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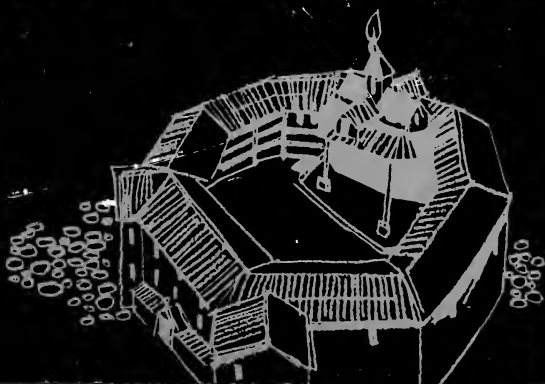
Growth of the English Stage

W. Bridges-Adams



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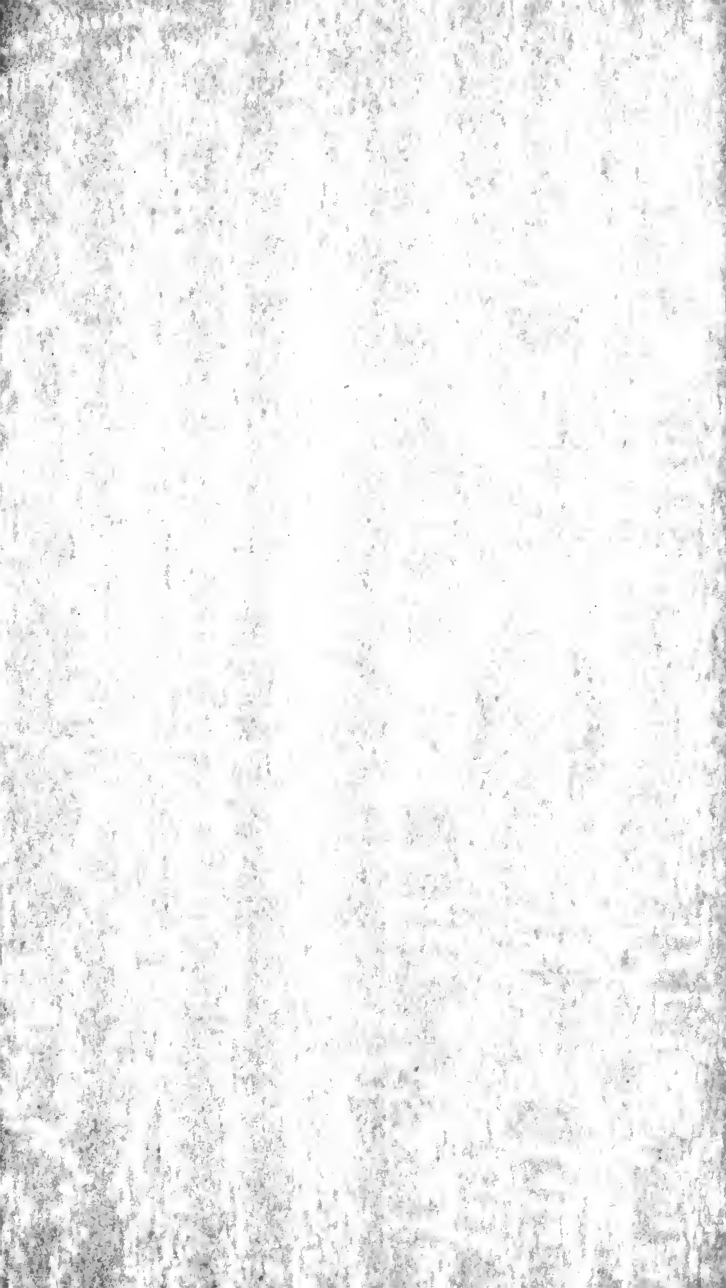
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of the English theatre
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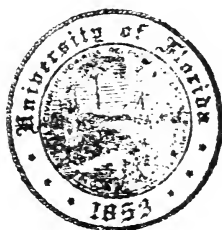
Growth of the
English Stage

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The theatre is irresistible.....

MATTHEW ARNOLD

FOREWORD

IN 1922 William Archer estimated that to bring up to date Sir Adolphus Ward's *History of English Dramatic Literature* (which ends with the reign of Queen Anne) would entail from five to ten years of unremitting labour. Shortly before 1900 Sir Edmund Chambers contemplated "a little book" on Shakespeare, but thought it advisable to prepare the ground; the preparation took him a quarter of a century, in the course of which there appeared *The Medieval Stage* in two volumes and *The Elizabethan Stage* in four, and finally the little book came out, in two, in 1925. In 1911 Dr Montague Summers discussed with Mr A. H. Bullen his projected history of the Restoration theatre, but felt that a further period of research was necessary before he could proceed; the first instalment appeared in 1934. In 1931 Professor Allardyce Nicoll brought out his *Masks, Mimes and Miracles* as a companion-piece to his *Development of the Theatre*; it has some seventeen hundred footnotes, yet in his preface he insists that it is not a work of "scholarship". Clearly, this book of mine must present itself with modesty.

Much of it is perforce what the French call a vulgarisation. It aims no higher than to introduce the general reader to the history of the English stage in all its aspects: the play in script and on the boards, the player and his quality, the playhouse and its trappings and economy: with such suggestions of historical and social background as may here and there be helpful. When I was young, and as mad about the theatre as I was uninformed, I greatly needed a book that would do this for me, comprehensively, accurately and as readably as might be. Today there is a spate of books about the stage; nevertheless, I am encouraged to think there may still be a use for this one.

It would take a more skilled hand than mine to make of it a homogeneous or even a consistently engrossing work of art. Some sections, to some readers, will no doubt appear too much like lessons, others too full of technical detail; that can hardly be helped if the book is to do its duty by its subject as a whole. The loosely knit form I have adopted seems to me the best suited to the patchwork of fact, theory and comment that it is bound to be. In matters of fact I shall, of

course, try to be truthful, and in matters of theory—of conjecture or controversy—to give due weight to every view. Not always so, however, in matters of comment. Even the most objective of historians must sometimes make up his mind whether a thing was right or wrong. And the historian of an art, who has no business to put pen to paper unless he can do so with some degree of enthusiasm, must continually be deciding that this or that is beautiful or ugly, fraudulent or honest, lively or on the road to decay. Accordingly, in matters of comment I shall not hesitate to indulge my own preferences, prejudices perhaps, confident that the reader will recognise them for what they are, and will be emboldened to differ from me whenever he is so inclined. Only on such an understanding dare I attempt the most formidable task this work imposes: the passing of brief judgments on famous men.

My acknowledgements are not the less profound because they are few. It was Mr John Hampden who originally instigated me to follow up my short account of the British Theatre with an effort on a more extensive scale. When I was starting work I was indebted to Professor F. S. Boas and Mr Guy Boas jointly for an act of practical kindness that they have probably forgotten and I have not. I owe much to the friendship and wise counsel of Mr John Moore and Mr Ivor Brown. It is difficult to express adequately my gratitude to Professor Arthur Colby Sprague, of Bryn Mawr College, who has (one might almost say) nursed this book from the first draft to the galley-proofs, tirelessly reading and advising and supplying me with references innumerable. A word of thanks is also due to Miss Janet Agnew, Librarian of the same institution, and to Mr William Cahill, Acting Librarian of University College, Cork. Dr Richard Southern has placed his unique knowledge of stage construction at my disposal, and has furnished a number of photographs. I am indebted to the editor of *Theatre Notebook* and to the Clarendon Press, Oxford, for the loan of certain blocks. In the List of Illustrations individual acknowledgments are made to the persons and institutions that have kindly permitted the reproduction of works in their possession; I am particularly beholden to Mr Walter H. Godfrey and Mr C. Walter Hodges for allowing me to use their respective reconstructions of the Fortune and Globe playhouses. I have also to thank my wife for much arduous checking of dates and ascriptions, Miss Reith Coote for assistance in proofreading, Mrs Ian Conner for translating my palimpsests into neat typescript, and the staff of the London Library, as ever, for help in time of need.

W. B.-A.

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PART ONE

From the Conquest to the Tudors

“The theatre is irresistible; . . .”

Matthew Arnold

Chapter 1

The Family Tree

DRAMA HAS BEEN defined as character revealed in action; it is born when acting mates with a story. Acting is born when mimicry mates with lyricism. Mimicry alone is not acting; some mimics are bad actors; a caterpillar is not acting when it pretends to be a twig. Nor is lyricism alone; singers are not always good actors; a bird is not acting when it sings.

This strange dual gift is not the exclusive property of our species. We do not know what goes on in the mind of a performing flea, whatever his impresario may say. When a cockatoo cuts in on our conversation with the surrealist aptness in which cockatoos, still more than parrots, seem especially to delight, we cannot be sure that this is a deliberate stroke of comedy, even though the creature drives his point home by turning a slow half-somersault immediately after. Seals and sea-lions, one fears, are exhibitionists merely. The chimpanzee who was not long ago a familiar figure on the music-hall stage, with his theatre sense, his lust for approbation and his tantrums, had something in him of the true historian. For all that, he was a variety artist, not an actor.

On the other hand, anyone who enjoys the confidence of an imaginative dog must acknowledge not only that his friend has a certain power of simulation and some gift of lyrical expression, but also that with a little encouragement he will bring both to bear on a devised happening that we might call a play. The game of Finding It is a well-composed one-dog drama, complete with exposition, conflict, crisis and dénouement. Nor is it entirely a dumb-show. At appropriate moments of the action there will be utterance, in the form of lyrically heightened barks; because the very heart of the matter is that everything is happening in a world of make-believe far removed from, yet mysteriously interpreting, the world in which one hunts cats, goes out with the guns, or eats one's dinner. Indeed a dog of taste will positively prefer that the hidden object shall be inedible and useless, a symbol merely; for this exacting rite a rubber ball is even better than a bone. And he is so clear in his own mind that his performance is

a work of art that the instant it is over he will clamour to do it again and yet again, insisting in yelp after yelp that the show deserves a run.

It is impossible to say at what moment the germ of acting became apparent in the human make-up, but authorities are agreed that the art itself is very nearly as old as mankind. It is likely that our forefathers first mimicked from an instinct of self-protection, as the aforesaid caterpillar and other living organisms do, and that their first lyrical utterance took the shape of leaping, shouting and clapping their hands—perhaps on fine mornings when it was exceptionally pleasant to be alive. But it would be natural for these manifestations to be directed in a spirit of worship toward the visible source of the fine morning, that is to say the sun; and for the notion to grow that on dull mornings one might induce the sun to show himself by repeating them. There is an instinctive belief in the human heart that by invoking the name, or by making or even touching the image, of a desired thing we draw to ourselves the virtue inherent in that thing. This belief lies behind the magic a child finds in a toy, or a grown man in a model yacht; our superstitions thrive on it; withcraft directs it one way, the Church another. And the making of an image is a form of mimicry. So also is the counterfeiting, even for the highest purpose, of an emotion. The rapture with which primitive man acclaimed the sun was lyrical. But—to pursue the fancy—the very moment he reproduced those raptures in advance, in the hope of coaxing the sun to appear, an element of mimicry was present: albeit of a kind very different from the mimicry that pretends to be what it is not through fear of being killed.

In this (or some such) way mimicry began to align itself with lyricism in the act of worship. The two forces only awaited full co-ordination by some authoritative member of the community who was believed to be peculiarly accessible to intimations from the unseen world—in other words, by the priest—to evolve between them the ritual dance: the earliest known form of religious service, and the source from which drama springs. The similarity of origin and development in races that could have had no kind of contact with each other supports the view that the urge to *act* is innate in all humanity, and that we have all had the same sense of the drama as a magical, not to say holy, thing. In China and Japan we find the early stage adjacent to the temple, as for a time it was to our churches in the Middle Ages. The dramatic-religious parades of the Polynesians have been likened

to the procession to Eleusis. In India an elaborately codified theatrical art derived in the course of centuries from the sacred dance. There are some who trace the descent of Italian comedy, by one devious line, back to the harvest thanksgivings of Etruria.¹

But, as everybody knows, it was in Greece, a small country fitted by climate and position to be the cradle of our Western culture, that from the celebration round the altar of Dionysus there emerged a drama which continues to impose its standards to-day. The dancing-floor of trodden earth became the paved *orchestra*; the rude *skene* or tent in which the heirophants kept their gear became a façade of stone, pierced by ominous doorways and housing machines for the transport of the gods and the exhibition of the slain. And in their turn the lovely theatres of Athens and Epidaurus begot the imposing Roman playhouse, differing less in its structure than in the luxury of its appointments, its silken awnings, its scented air: a monument of material wealth and spiritual poverty that afforded, with the full concurrence of its patrons, a halfpennyworth of bread to an intolerable deal of sack.

Such at least is the stock opinion; the view that the sound examiner elicits from the bright examinee. And it is incontestable that, so long as we think only of the written drama, mighty Rome plays an ignominious second to little Athens. Athens, within the space of not much more than a century, yielded a tragedy to which we still turn for its serene affirmation of divinely ordained harmony and law, dark with horror not to be avoided yet must civilisedly sparing of horrors; satiric comedy that is still lusty and still strikes home; lines to touch the heart and rebuke the vanities of any age, and parts to which great players aspire when they have squeezed Hamlet and Cleopatra dry. While Rome, for all the centuries vouchsafed her—what has Rome to offer? Names in plenty, imitators and adapters in plenty. For Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides we have the formidable array of Livius Andronicus, Naevius, Ennius, Pacuvius, Accius, Atilius, Asinius Pollio—where are they now? Above them towers the dark and bloody Seneca, chiefly to be remembered as the dead ally of literary authoritarianism in the Renaissance and a menace more than a guide to the free growth of English tragedy. Of a native counterpart to the raciness and vigour of Aristophanes there may have been some promise in the Etruscan farce of the *Atellanae*, country-bred and town-polished;² if this was indeed the remote forerunner of the *Commedia dell' Arte*, so much the better for its fame. In comedy the stalwarts, true stal-

warts, are Plautus and the chaster Terence, copyists of the Greek Menander; since the English theatre owes them much it would be ungrateful to enquire, as some have done, whether they would have lived if Menander and all his works had not died. Faced with these plain facts and encouraged by the satirists and certain indignant Early Fathers, the bright examinee might well conclude that the Roman theatre, no less than the Roman drama, was well on the downgrade before the coming of the Caesars, and that the circus, the mimes and the pantomimists bore down on it with their inexplicable dumb-shows and noise until, in the dreadful words of Dr Mantzius, "Christianity drove its stake through this antique spectre, and ancient dramatic art ended its existence with a hideous lascivious grimace".³

Simplifications of this kind are effective and satisfying, but they are dangerous. They prompt us to attach neat morals to what seems to be an edifying tale. Athens, we remind ourselves, was a Democracy, whatever those cynics may say who maintain that it was in fact an extremely quarrelsome club with three thousand members and ten thousand servants; Athens was a Democracy and Rome was a naughty Empire. What could be easier or more tempting than to point out that a nation wishful to produce great drama must rate the things of the spirit above such matters as the extension of its territory, the framing of laws and the planning of roads and other public works? All our sloth of mind applauds such an easy dismissal of the Roman theatre.

It is a lamentable but uncontrovertible fact that actors, when brought to the point, have shewn more than once that they are not entirely dependant on drama. They welcome drama, so long as it is of a kind that seems to understand their ways. If it does not fulfill that condition, they are perfectly prepared either to amend it until it does, or to do without it and rely on their own patter and their own immemorial ability to freeze your marrow or set your heart aflame with lines that do not by any means deserve such high employment. English theatrical history, which is the concern of this book, is fain to confess that through a number of generations English acting of the first rank flourished and waxed fat on a drama that was barely of the second. The palmy days of the actor were the most unpalmy days of dramaturgy. May not something of the kind have happened in Rome?

In justice to the Roman imitators, we have to reflect that the Greeks, through the coincidence of opportunity, capacity and will, had already said nearly everything that in their time was

to be said. Whoever gets first cut has an enormous advantage. The poet who first had the luck to write of the rosy-fingered dawn established an inalienable patent; his successors may scramble for the remainder of Aurora's person, but the fingers are his, and nothing else is quite so apt. With the known world of drama already in the possession of a subject but intellectually maturer people, might not the Roman spirit have sought, whatever its literary bent might be, a new form of expression, all of its very own, in an independent art of acting?

The status of the Roman player, we are told, was dismal. While in Athens a leading actor had ranked as a kind of priest, a prized ornament of the community who was honourably exempt from military service, in Rome he ranked as a slave, to whom the privilege of conscription was denied. He was a chattel and an outlaw, could not marry outside the confines of his serfdom, and was liable to flogging at the hands of his manager, either as a measure of discipline or at the insistence of an audience he had displeased. Yet from this abyss of indignity the individual actor might rise to a pinnacle of fortune and favour. The great Roscius achieved freedom, respect and wealth; he was created a senator by Sulla and enjoyed the friendship of Cicero, whom he instructed in the art of diction.⁴ The actresses, several of whom managed their own companies—and a Roman company on tour was as elaborate an organisation as any manager conceives of to-day—were esteemed not only for their art and their beauty, as was Cytharis, the mistress of Antony, but often for their qualities of mind and character, as was the "most radiant" Julia Bassilla, who sleeps in Taormina. We learn that when Pelagia of Antioch went abroad in her litter with a splendid train, the air was perfumed by the unguents with which she was anointed (a little exotic, we may think, but she died a saint of the Church) and was set a-shimmer, according to the same observer, by the flashing of her jewels.⁵ The adulation bestowed upon the stage, not only by the populace but by the discerning and the great, reached its climax when, in place of the song-and-dance comedy of the mimes, Pylades and Bathyllus perfected the art of pantomime, a speechless acting which boasted that there was nothing in life it could not express.⁶ We may imagine our present cult of the ballet carried to a point at which the spoken drama ceased to be a thing of importance.

It has been a generally accepted view that when the theatre took this turn it pronounced its own doom, thereafter linger-

ing on miserably until the Church made an end of it; in short that between the stage that perished in the Roman decadence and the stage that arose in the Middle Ages the breach was absolute. But Professor Allardyce Nicoll, in his *Masks, Mimes and Miracles*, went to a great deal of trouble to test this judgment and, indeed, to supply a missing chapter in theatrical history. And the more carefully one reads him, the harder it becomes to credit that for some seven centuries the theatrical art of Rome was rotten and without hope, still less that it was finally crushed by the hostility of the Church. Certainly the Christians, when they appeared upon the scene, had no reason to feel friendly. A Dionysian institution which the people loved because it saw the funny side of everything from adultery to religious fervour, was not likely to be less objectionable to a new and militant faith than it had been to a debilitated and half-serious paganism. Yet the stage was to have its Christian converts, not all of whom renounced their calling as beautiful Pelagia did; it was to have its Christian martyrs. The picture that unfolds itself in Professor Nicoll's pages is not one of extermination, but rather of a never-ending guerilla warfare in which authority was continually coming to terms with a force which it could neither abolish nor control. *Delenda est* was the Church's policy; but this resilient art was not to be destroyed.

On the eve of the third century A.D. the learned and holy Tertullian, in a famous passage, anathematises the actor and all his works, sweeping him from the face of the earth, as one would suppose, for ever. In the fourth century the Arians of Alexandria are rebuked by St John Chrysostom for entering into competition with the actors and introducing strange theatrical delights in their ceremonial. In the fifth century the Synod of Arras excludes the actor from Holy Communion (but not from the Church) during the period of a professional engagement. In the sixth century the learned and holy Choricus, a lone champion, defends the stage with much good sense and a warm heart. In the seventh century the bishops in conclave at Constantinople decide that the time has come (at last) "utterly to prohibit those who are called mimes, together with the theatres". In the eighth century the same city shews a notable enthusiasm for religious drama. In the ninth century an edict of Charlemagne forbids the wearing of priestly vestments by actors—which suggests to Professor Nicoll either that the stage was still dauntlessly mocking the Church or that the Church was beginning to find a use for the stage. In the tenth century the St Gall manuscript lays down the rubric

for the first of the Mysteries, and the play of *Elijah* is performed in the cathedral of St Sophia.⁷

So much for the decay under persecution; what of the decay from within? The "bizarre caprices" (says Dr Mantzius through his translator) of Pylades and Bathyllus were the last flickers of the old dramatic art. That was in the reign of Augustus. From what still smouldering ashes, then, did the mime and pantomimist Theodora, daughter of the Master of the Bears, rise to become Empress of the East in A.D. 526? For Gibbon she is baggage, and worse; in the kindlier eyes of Dr Masfield an accomplished and pertinacious actress-manager not unlike Madame Vestris; but from neither of these authorities do we gather that the art she professed was anything but riotously alive.⁸ No doubt it was liberally salted with obscenity. But actors who pursue obscenity for its own sake are rare; and that the stage of Theodora's day had thriven for hundreds of years on foulness and nothing else is a notion affronting to the reason and too dreary for the imagination to entertain. There must have been—indeed we know there was—intelligence, wit and fancy in the conception, and in the performance much grace and skill. When the Early, and not so early, Fathers denounced the art as pernicious, a great cause of their unceasing annoyance may have been that in its own belief it was not pernicious, or even decadent, and that unregenerate humanity refused to do without it.

There is nothing to be gained by writing about the theatre from any point of view other than its own, yet it requires a great effort of the imagination to see the actor of those times as he saw himself. The actor's perennial complaint is that his fame dies with him; we can, more or less, reconstruct Cicero, but we have to guess a good deal about his illustrious theatrical friend. To-day, if an actor is judged important enough, he is assured of a celluloid immortality. But his grievance will persist in another form: he was the child of his age, the age that thought him fine, and that age also dies, perhaps not long after he does. Will posterity insult his ghost and tune in on his outmoded sublimities in the hope of discovering not what *he* was like, but what was the taste of the age that admired him?

Within the frame of such facts as we know, our fancy is tempted to compose a generic image of the Roman mime as a person worthy, when the hour struck, to bear the torch along the darkest stretch of the road that led from Athens to Bank-side. A dyed-in-the-wool histrion, then; not averse to noble

drama but by no means at a loss without it; cheerfully adjusting himself to the world about him; not crushed by his slavish condition but translating it into something proud and glorious, first in his own eyes and then—if he were a Roscius—in fact; not a chained captive in the pageant of the decline but magnificently unaware that so far as he was concerned there was any decline at all; hilarious, witty, able, engaging, daring, obstreperous and alive; an incalculable mocker of authority; outwardly dependent on favour, patronage, protection and inwardly secure in his own mysterious scale of values; disdainful of man-made system as the cheeky wild-flowers that spring up where man's work falls in ruin, or the fruits of the earth at whose harvesting his art first learned its power; amoral and derisive of the gods, taking all life as it presented itself to his understanding and finding it good, yet unmistakably possessed of the spirit, celebrating in his own perverse way the divinity in wayward man; not abashed by Christian disapproval but gaily twitting the Fathers as on one memorable occasion he had twitted Caesar himself; again adapting himself to circumstances when the barbarians brought a whole civilisation tumbling down about him; taking to the road; keeping himself going somehow, as a jongleur of the banned class that counterfeited God's image, as a minstrel extolling gestes in the North and love in the South, as a vagabond, rogue or plain thief; carrying always with him, through the longest and toughest resistance in history, the jargon, the tawdry outfit, the secrets and the freemasonry of an outlawed art. One day, perhaps when more than local talent was needed for the ravings of Herod or the antics of the Fiend, he was to feel the blessed boards beneath his feet again. Inexterminable, irrepressible, irresistible: the breach is in the telling, not in the tale.

Chapter 2

Mystery, Miracle, Morality, Interlude

IT WILL BE helpful to begin by classifying.

Properly speaking, a Mystery (from *ministerium*=service) was a play deriving directly from the liturgy of the Church, that is to say an extension in dramatic form of the Christian ritual; it drew its subject-matter originally from the events narrated in the Gospels and later from the Bible as a whole, from the first chapter of Genesis onwards. Properly speaking, a Miracle was a play representing the acts, including as the name implies the miracles, performed by a saint; and thus, although it was a development of the Mystery, it was not confined, as the true Mystery was, to the Bible as a source. The play of the Resurrection was a Mystery, indeed the first of the Mysteries. But while, for example, a Miracle could to-day be written about the life of St Bernadette of Lourdes, a Mystery could not.

Against this distinction, upheld by Professor Nicoll, we have to set the view of Sir Edmund Chambers that it was a "not very happy" invention of the literary historians.¹ The point need not trouble us greatly, for in England our custom of assembling both Mysteries proper and Miracles proper in a great cycle of religious drama tended inevitably to blur whatever difference there was. Accordingly in this country we find the two words used indiscriminately, Miracle for preference, and it will make for clarity in these pages to treat the two forms as one. If in any instance the reader wishes to be more precise, he need only apply the ruling offered him above.¹

The Morality was a later product. Its purpose, like that of its predecessors, was to edify, but to do so by exhibiting on the stage personifications of the human vices and virtues which, with other abstractions, contended for the soul of the central figure, Man. We shall see in due course that it marks a step toward the secular drama, and that it constitutes a link in the chain that unites the medieval theatre with the Globe.

The Interlude, a name derived from the *interludium* of the Roman mimes, was, properly speaking, a sketch interpolated

between two major items in an entertainment, or between two acts of a longer play. More loosely used, the word came to embrace any play of brief duration. A point to be noted is that whereas the object of the Morality was always the improvement of the spectator, the object of the Interlude became more often than not to amuse him. The *Interlude of Youth* is neither more nor less than a short Morality of high and moving seriousness; the *Interlude of Jacke Juggler* is a farce. The Interlude, in short, not only carried us a further step toward a secular drama; it became, in the event, secular drama.

Chapter 3

Ourselves and the Middle Ages

IT WILL ALSO be helpful if, here and throughout, we endeavour to see not only the theatre of a particular era as it saw itself, but also that era as it saw itself. In the case of the Middle Ages this calls for a considerable projection of the spirit. The gulf between then and now is more than proportionately greater than the gulf between now and the time of the first Elizabeth. So different are the processes of thought and the forms in which thought finds expression, that a Shakespearean actor of to-day is likely to encounter more difficulty in memorising early English drama than an actor of modern comedy does in memorising Shakespeare. If, as is improbable, such an actor were to steep himself for very long in a whole round of medieval parts, he might discover (for this drama casts a subtle spell) that an archaic mode had taken possession of him, and might even have to exert himself to shake it off when next he studied Elizabethan verse and prose. A reason for this cleavage is that in the Middle Ages the mind of European man had not yet undergone the experiences of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

It is interesting to compare the attitudes which each successive age has adopted toward this earlier one, not suspecting that thereby it might be passing judgment on itself. As to the medieval drama, there was until recent times but one opinion. In the "banes" (banns, or preliminary announcement) read in 1600 before a revival of the Chester plays, then two hundred years old, apology is made for their simplicity and their use of gross and outmoded words. The audience are warned not to expect

those matters to be contrived

In such sort and cunning and by such players of price.

As at these days good preserve and fine wits could devise.

Restoration taste, which held—until Dryden began the slow process of enlightenment¹—that it could teach Shakespeare a thing or two about form and polish, would certainly have been scandalised by the now famous *Second Shepherd's Play* in the Towneley cycle. To Warton, writing in the eighteenth

century and quoted by Malone, who seems to concur, the Mysteries and Miracles were "monstrous and unnatural mixtures" of the sacred and worse-than-profane. In the nineteenth, the Early English Text Society began to bring to light a whole series of unassuming works of art and faith.² Yet in 1903 that indefatigable chronicler of the London stage Mr Barton Baker pronounced a performance of *Everyman* at the Court theatre "a most curious resuscitation".³ Within a few years the Morality of *Everyman* was played all over England, and within a few more, in its German version, was drawing the world to Salzburg. And to-day the York Cycle of Mysteries, revived in the city of its origin, has proved once and for all, we may hope, that this curious kind of drama has not lost its power to stir the heart.

As to medieval man himself, who wrote and played the plays and saw them, it is instructive and amusing to contrast the confidence of the age of reason, which commiserated him because he knew not the mental stimulus of doubt, or of the mechanical age, which wondered in what contemptible fashion he got along without mass-production, with the great and dreadful doubt that hangs over all of us to-day. Macaulay's New Zealander sketching the ruins of St Paul's from a broken arch of London Bridge is no longer an engaging figure of fancy; he is a disturbing reminder of close shaves. Yet we were becoming interested in medieval man long before the exigence of war impelled us to batter the creature's masterpieces. The mechanical age was shewing signs of peevishness, like a child with too many clockwork toys, many years before it could do more than speculate as to the end of the adventure. A mood of reaction was setting in. The preaching of John Ruskin exhibited one facet of it, William Morris's cult of handicrafts another. The issues of Progress and the Simple Life became inextricably tangled up with the age-long conflict of Science and Religion; and in consequence there emerged two popular conceptions of medieval man that were as over-coloured as they were hard to reconcile. According to the one, he was a benighted oaf, incurably depressed by his awareness that he had been born before the Renaissance. According to the other, he was an apple-checked innocent, singing like a bird as he pegged away at his surprisingly mathematical cathedrals, and daily thanking God that he had not yet been interfered with by the Reformation.

To-day, chastened and scared, we are not disposed either to a sentimental or a patronising view, especially when our growing historical sense prompts us to wonder how future

ages may think of us. We reproach medieval man, as playwright, with a certain scatter-mindedness; what will they say of our insistence that Distraction shall be laid on like water from the tap? We shudder at the Black Death; will they shudder at the slaughter on our highways? If we say—with some justice, considering the stench he put up with—that medieval man had no nose, may not men of even finer sensibility than ours decide that we, who debauched our sky with noise and our countryside with pylons, had neither ears nor eyes?

Allowing for the difference in the working of their minds that we have already noted, and for all their supposed deprivations or advantages, we shall not go far wrong in assuming that the people of that age had a good deal in common with ourselves. Historians have remarked on certain similarities between the epoch in which the Mysteries and Miracles flourished and times that are much nearer. There was seething discontent, voiced in *Piers Plowman* and by the Towneley shepherds, who complain of taxation and meddling on the part of authority, of peacock-proud bureaucrats and “gentlemen”; and this discontent was at the disposal of any leader able enough to manipulate it for his own ends. Socialism was in the air, if only the not very doctrinaire socialism of John Ball; trade unionism of a kind was coming to grips with capitalism of a kind, and was learning to handle the weapon of the closed shop. Scepticism in religious matters was as unrewarding to the sceptic as it is to-day in ideological matters; but the Church did not escape criticism, and the Lollards were proclaiming that grace was the only true sanction of ecclesiastical authority. For the learned, although not every clerk was that, there was the international language of Latin, a better medium of understanding than Esperanto was to prove. English was still a hybrid of Norman French and Anglo-Saxon; it was nearly two centuries after the Conquest that the first royal proclamation in English was made,⁴ and English manuscripts of a much later date can be placed geographically by the kind of English in which they are written; but it was being welded into a true thing. This was an age not only of great architecture, but of great educational endowments; science of a kind was needed by the one and was not frowned on by the other. It was not altogether an uncouth age in its way of life. Contemporary books of etiquette set great store by good table manners, as did Chaucer’s lady; with the help of a napkin and a finger-bowl it was possible to gnaw your cutlet daintily. Although the fourteenth century was not destined to taste the excitements of the Renaissance and the

Reformation, it had preoccupations and satisfactions of its own that were not wholly antipathetic to those great stirrings of the human spirit. One might almost say that in some half-discerning fashion England was preparing to receive them when they came.

Chapter 4

Dramatic Art at the time of the Conquest

THERE IS NO TRACE of drama in Saxon England, whether native or imported, nor of the actor, even in any of the disguises that necessity compelled him to assume. The Roman theatre near St Alban's (Verulamium) was in ruins or beneath the sod; if it had been standing no one would have guessed what it had been built for.

The germ of drama, it is true, existed in a hundred rustic observances, games and dances, which have been exhaustively studied by Sir Edmund Chambers.¹ As among other peoples, they were held on days of importance in the cycle of the seasons: ploughing, sowing, midsummer, harvesting, and the bringing in of the cattle for killing and salting when the first snow fell. As among other peoples, their purpose was to celebrate and propitiate the powers that were held to preside over fertility; they embodied a paganism, older than any known pagan creed, which lives on to this day in certain rural customs and taboos. Mimicry played a part, in the form of dressing up, of making and wearing or parading the image or symbol appropriate to the season; one such symbol was the Maypole, one such image was the last wheatsheaf of the harvest trimmed into human shape. Lyricism played a part, in the accompanying song or dance. But the two did not unite to produce anything that we can truly call acting, any more than the primitive rites performed could be called drama. The actor, with other persons of lineage more respected but hardly more ancient, came over with the Conqueror; within half a century drama, of a sort, was to follow him.

In Europe, from Byzantium to the West, the secular theatre had never—the accumulated evidence is conclusive—lost its hold on the public. Whether the Church sought to ban it, or to come to an accommodation with it, or to divert its art to holy purposes, it had contrived to keep its head up with the shameless vitality which is often to be observed in amoral persons and institutions. In this eleventh century it was still enchanting young men of breeding and education as in the

fourth it had enchanted the young Augustine: a patrician of the eastern Empire complains that his son spends all his time at the play. It flourishes through the following century to such effect that in the next, in 1283, there appears in France *Robin et Marion*, first of all comic operas;² but new things in art derive from old. Five years later there is record of *bufoni* and *mimi* in Milan,³ giving performances that are clearly of a dramatic nature: does this mean that the *Commedia dell' arte* is already on the way? Yet buffoons and mimes were the very people whom the Early Fathers most strenuously and particularly damned. It is merely as a footnote to his argument that Professor Nicoll adduces a number of little drawings which are to be seen in the Studien-Bibliothek in Salzburg.⁴ They may represent actors, or contortionists, or even marionettes, for there are a few vertical lines that look like wires or strings. But the figures, whatever they are, are clearly theatrical, and of the thirteenth century; and one of them is quite unmistakably wearing the emblem of male fertility that was customary on the comic stage of Athens and of Rome. We are not at the moment concerned with the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; but if that usage of the ancient secular theatre was still thriving then, the ancient secular theatre can hardly have been moribund in 1066.

Even if it were possible to write an honest account of the early stage without some mention of the fearful object, we should be less than human if we did not marvel at this persistence of the phallus. No doubt it affirmed, joyously at first, then more lewdly and at last perfunctorily, certain tenets of the Dionysian doctrine. But, when scholars are trying to savour the finer points in Terence, are they to be troubled by visions of a comedian, hideously masked, who has strapped about his middle an outrageous caricature of an organ which has in fact its serious uses? Did a comedian, who in the hurry of a quick-change forgot to put it on, feel emasculate, naked and ashamed? Did his audience rebuke him? ⁵

Yet the persistence of the phallus is surpassed by the persistence of the bald head of the Clown and the peaked (or ass-eared) cap of the Fool. The bald head may still be seen in the circus. The peaked cap made its way not quite so far, but at least as far as *Twelfth Night* and *Lear*, having previously adorned, no one is quite certain why, the head of the Vice in the earlier moral interludes.⁶ For the peaked cap was the emblem of Folly, of an inspired Asininity, divinely sanctioned on suitable occasions. It was the eternal symbol of the Rag, a periodic outburst which academic dignity is still constrained

occasionally to acknowledge. Folly was the mainspring of the extraordinary carnivals in which the Middle Ages let off steam; it established, on certain assigned dates, the dictatorship of the Lord of Misrule, the master-of-ceremonies of the Absurd. Periodically even the Church allowed it a brief moment of supremacy. For the Feast of Fools was a hilarious and very gross burlesque of the rites of the Church, performed in the church itself by the minor clergy who, being poorly paid, collected tribute from the multitude; it was largely an ebullition, Sir Edmund Chambers surmises, of "the natural lout beneath the cassock". Similarly, the choir found an outlet in the Feast of Boys, deriving from the Feast of the Innocents and incorporating the enthronement of a Boy Bishop. Papal displeasure made an end of the Feast of Fools before the fifteenth century.⁷ In England at least the Feast of Boys survived, and became a comparatively decorous institution; it was even provided for in the statutes of certain educational foundations⁸—but the note of carnival was maintained. Surely the ebullition, however loutish, was also one of natural resilience against artificial rigidity, a stammering assertion of the comic spirit as against authority, an uprising of the Dionysian that is in us all in defiance of the Puritan that is in us all. There is no direct connection between these feasts of Folly and the theatre, secular or religious; but the Fool and the Actor have more than a little in common, both being Irregulars who at will can turn our logic upside down.⁹

Of secular drama, that is to say of plays that were not only played but written, there is almost no record; although we may conjecture that, together with the age-old plots and stage-business, some snatches of dialogue were transmitted orally from generation to generation of mimes. Nearest to anything of the kind are a number of quasi-dramatic poems and dialogues on the Plautine model. Of the Greek drama some lines of Aeschylus and Euripides found their way into the *Passion of Christ*, a composition in dramatic form at one time ascribed to the fourth century but now to a later date.¹⁰ But it was notably in the works of the Roman Terence, surviving in the safe keeping of the monasteries, that the ancient written drama was preserved. Not that the monks conceived of anything in the nature of an acted play; contemporary illustrations of his text shew a reader, possibly Terence himself, in a kind of pulpit, with a cluster of mimes about him who are evidently impersonating his characters in dumb-show¹¹ The rewriting of a pagan poet's lines in terms of Christian teaching

and the recital, not playing, of the amended version were no doubt among the relaxations of monastic life. Hrosvitha of Gandersheim in Saxony¹² enjoys a celebrity that she deserves, perhaps, not merely because her works in this vein happen to be extant. For the most part they are sternly didactic, and their heaviness is relieved only by a few very un-nunlike excursions into farce, although on occasion this devout and erudite lady could write with passion, and with some understanding of the hunger of the flesh. One of them saw the light at a special matinee in London many years ago, and made no great impression. Yet it proved itself playable; and if evidence should some day be forthcoming that, even within the walls of Gandersheim, this or any other of her plays was in fact *performed*—why, there would be an end of our confident assertion that in the tenth century the western world had no conception of an acted drama.

Chapter 5

The First of the Mysteries

IT IS A REASONABLE conjecture that the religious drama of the Middle Ages came into being through the desire of the Church to make the Gospel story real to an unlettered congregation. A more forceful presentment was needed than could be achieved by the liturgy, by the priest at the lectern or in the pulpit, or even by the carver of images and the fabricator of stained glass. The recitals and responses of the Mass had a strong element of drama; so had the movements of the celebrant and his ministers: Christ on the Cross was a dramatically powerful figure. At the Feast of the Nativity the effigies of Mary and her Baby in the stall at Bethlehem had the visual appeal of a stage scene, that could not fail to touch the hearts of every mother, child and father who beheld it. Yet it was, understandably, the Resurrection that was chosen when the time came for a more daring venture into the realm of make-believe; and at a certain Easter celebration in the tenth century the decisive step was taken. The ceremonial interment of the Cross on Good Friday was a near-dramatic act of symbolism. But when on the following Sunday three figures, impersonating the three Maries, advanced toward an empty Sepulcher, the devout onlookers were confronted with liturgical drama.

In ecclesiastical parlance the *Quem Quaeritis* was a Trope, one of the many interpolations with which, since the days of Charlemagne, a cleric who was also a poet or a musician was permitted to embellish the ritual celebration, very much as a cleric who was also a draughtsman was permitted to embellish the sacred script with ornate capitals and other inventions. A cleric-poet and a cleric-musician were free to collaborate in the lengthening of a *Gloria* or a *Kyrie eleison* by the insertion of additional words and notes: here was the Trope in its simplest form. But it must have been (although he did not know it) a cleric-dramatist who first sought to enrich the ceremonial of his Church by invoking the ancient art of the actor.

The *Quem Quaeritis* is so called from the first words of the Latin text treasured by the monastery of St Gall, near Con-

stance. If we incorporate with the chanted dialogue the rubric, we may say stage-directions, laid down in the same century (the tenth) by St Ethelwold,¹ the whole may be Englished as follows:

Scene: Before the Sepulchre. Discovered, an Angel (? two Angels), in white, seated. Enter the three Maries, as if searching.

ANGEL(S) Whom seek ye in the tomb, O Christian women?

MARIES Jesus of Nazareth the Crucified, O heavenly beings.

ANGEL(S) He is not here: He is risen as He foretold;

Go; give tidings that He is risen from the tomb.

The players were clergy, originally, it is thought, wearing their vestments, but soon to be habited as became the parts they played; the Sepulchre was as a rule represented by a wooden structure set in an alcove, usually to the north of the chancel. In a few churches in this country it was fashioned in stone, and is still to be seen.

In thus pin-pointing the birth of the western Mystery we must not lose sight of the earlier Christian drama which for centuries had flourished on the seaboard of the Mediterranean, nor forget that the four-line *Quem Quaeritis* was, roughly speaking, contemporaneous with that grandoise *Elijah* for which, as we are told, St Sophia was "turned into a theatre". There is evidence that the eastern religious drama had reached a high stage of development before the western saw the light, and that the two had many elements in common. It is even probable that the west imbibed something from the east: for example it has been doubted whether so mature a work as the twelfth-century *Mystere d' Adam* could have sprung in so relatively short a time from an elementary liturgical drama unless other influences had played their part. But such considerations are beyond the scope of this book. Until research unsettles us once more, we shall run no serious risk of oversimplifying if we think of our western Mysteries and Miracles as stemming from the rubric of St Gall.²

On such slight foundations, then, there arose in time the immense edifice of European religious drama. Next in importance to Easter was Christmas, and it was not long before the tableau of Bethlehem began to speak and move. A fitting prelude was found in the episodes of the Star and of the Annunciation to the Shepherds, a fitting sequel in the Adoration of the Shepherds and of the Kings. Such episodes not only intensified the actuality of the story; they demanded

actuality in the treatment. For they brought secular types upon the scene; and the literal-minded spectator would certainly require that the shepherds should be convincing and the kings royally furnished. If the shepherds and kings must be adequately impersonated, what of Herod?—a part that asked some *panache* in the true performing of it, to tear a cat in, to make all split? We have noted the Morality as the first step toward a secular drama; but secular acting there had to be, almost from the beginning.

The development was natural and inescapable. In course of time this drama initiated by the Church began to outgrow the capacity of the Church to contain it, in more senses than one. So long as the action was confined to the central theme, it could be played in an arrangement (and a very elaborate and ingenious arrangement it became) of settings or "mansions" down the length of the nave. But as the subject-matter grew and grew, forward and back through New and Old Testament history, there was no choice but to transfer it bodily to a stage outside the great west door, precisely where Reinhardt mounted *Jedermann* at Salzburg; and even there a populace who may not have been very restrained as a congregation within the church, which was also their social centre, undoubtedly were less so when they found themselves an audience outside it. Eventually decorum counselled, and in 1227 Pope Gregory decreed, the removal of the show, for that is what it was becoming, from holy ground to the market-place or to the fields without the town. At Autun, in France, a huge amphitheatre was erected for the accommodation of spectators from far and near. And long before this point was reached a corresponding and equally inevitable transition had begun in the language in which the plays were given: from the monkish Latin to the vernacular. Those same shepherds may have helped to speed the change; for real shepherds do not converse in Latin, nor must stage ones, if they are to carry conviction.

Chapter 6

Medieval Staging

THERE WERE, SO TO SAY, two kinds of region in which the action of the Mystery (or Miracle) might proceed. One was finite, the other undefined. One was on, or in, certain special structures—"practicable", as stage language has it—which represented the houses and other localities needed for the play; these will here be called *mansions*, which is one of the many names by which they were known. The other kind of acting region was the space before or around these structures. The two bore to each other the same relationship as was later to exist between the platform stage and the (still debated) inner and upper stages of the Elizabethan playhouse. Like the platform stage, this space—generally known as the *platea*—could be used for comings and goings and for any action that took place nowhere in particular. It was the pavement in the church, the cobblestones in the market-place, the turf in the meadow. In the great settings of which Valenciennes affords the best-known example, it became a vast raised terrace, to which the scenic erections aforesaid provided a background. In the processional form of drama that England was to evolve, it might be no more than the roadway at the street corner.

The theatre of the Mysteries, as we have seen, was at first the chancel, later the whole church, later the ground outside the church, and finally the market-place or an open field. The staging arrangements kept step with this progression. For the *Quem Quaeritis* all that was needed was the Sepulchre, which may originally have been represented, one authority suggests, only by a few books piled upon the altar,¹ then by a temporary or permanent structure, which was as a rule on the priest's right hand as he faced the congregation. As the enacted story lengthened forward and backward from the central event of the Resurrection, further localities were needed. One at least the church could supply if it had stairs leading down from the chancel to the crypt, and that was the Mouth of Hell. Such stairs, also, were as a rule on the priest's *left* hand, and to the medieval mind dexter and sinister had a sig-

nificance which is still preserved in our use of the second of those words.

But the further extension of the drama involved more and more localities, and hence a growing number of mansions down the length of the nave. And now arose a problem of arrangement. So long as the action was compact, it was as easy as suitable to place Heaven on the right and Hell on the left. When the action extended down the nave, an alternative was to place Heaven at the eastern end of the building and Hell at the western, and the other localities between them. But supposing the mansions stretched in two lines down the nave, set between the columns of the aisles and facing inwards? Then a four-sided setting became possible: an elongated rectangle running from the east window to the west door. This offered a satisfactory solution of the problem of orientation. Heaven still confronted Hell across the nave or chancel; yet Heaven was the whole play's journey from Hell if one approached it by way of the chain of mansions, down and up the church.

This rectangular setting could be still further elaborated when the performance was transferred from the church to the open air. The Anglo-Norman *Resurrection* of the twelfth century is believed to have been an outdoor play. A prologue indicates, for the benefit of the spectator, the mansions necessary for the action.² It does this in order, and so explicitly that it has been found possible to draw a plan, which conforms in every detail to the lay-out indicated above. But this *Resurrection* made a modest demand: thirteen mansions all told, against an estimated total of forty on certain occasions. The extant sketch-diagram for the Lucerne Easter play of 1583³ shews a whole square of the city, within which the stage-carpenters have erected, one might almost say, a mimic town.

The outdoor setting however was not always rectangular. In a woodcut of the Martyrdom of Saint Apolline we may see an open-air performance as the public saw it, for this clearly represents not the real happening but a play. Here is shewn a semicircle of the appropriate mansions, ranging from Hell on the actors' left to Heaven on their right, and the circle is completed by a fence of wattle, presumably designed to keep back the spectators; the martyrdom is proceeding with great (and gross) actuality on the platea within. When in due course this form of drama reached Cornwall, circular arenas were employed;⁴ permanent erections, for traces of them may be seen to this day.

But it is the familiar Valenciennes drawing that most ap-

peals to the imagination, for it seems that at Valenciennes the audience confronted a stage that was already half-way to the *décor simultané* of the later French theatre. The platea has become a platform, raising the action above the heads of the populace. On it are set, in order from actor's left to right, nine ornate mansions: Hell, whale-mouthed and crammed with devilment and torture; Limbo; the Golden Gate, seen across a small artificial lake in which a ship is floating; the House of the Bishops; the Palace; Jerusalem, with high doors that no doubt opened for the Entry; the Temple; Nazareth, and finally Paradise, surmounted by an immense aureole in the midst of which the Father sits enthroned. Measured by two figures that are to be seen emerging from the mouth of Hell, this multiple setting cannot have been less than seventy feet across. Enclose it in a huge proscenium, surround it and top it with a cyclorama, and you have a *scene*.

It will be interesting, as this book proceeds, to trace the growth of that scenic convention which some of us to-day deplore: to observe how the naughty Italians lured us on (as why should they not, having such painters?); how the bleak certitudes of the Elizabethan Stage Society were destined to be shaken from an unexpected quarter; how the *décor simultané* was still asserting itself when the red plush curtains of His Majesty's parted and rose to reveal Master Page's house on one side and the Garter Inn on the other. Valenciennes suggests that the Middle Ages were strongly scenic-minded, if only they could find the way.

The medieval theatre's pursuit of illusion must have been rather like our own when we were very small and were playing Let's Pretend. Now, we said, we were in the garden; now we were in the house; now we were upstairs. When such figments of the imagination took substance, the medieval producer did not say: We must have a scene with a garden, and a house, and some stairs that shall be visible when the front-door is open. He said: First we must have a garden; after that we must have a house; after that, we must have an upper room; and our audience must accompany us to each of these in turn. He assuredly experienced the thrill, which in the theatre never dies, of making-believe with timber, canvas and paint, and it is equally certain that his constructions were hailed as master pieces of realism by the public. But here was a *succession* of scenes, the crowd standing round each of them in turn; and the acting on the platea below had no doubt to contend with conditions as hugger-mugger as any that embarrass a street acrobat to-day. When, as the *Saint Apolline*

drawing shews, the platea became a fixed acting area, fenced to exclude the onlookers, and the semicircle of mansions formed a variegated but continuous background, one could almost begin to speak of the front-of-the-house and behind-the-scenes. And when Valenciennes entered on its prime, the raised platea and unified decoration of the line of mansions that backed it gave scope for displays of action and spectacle of a kind not essentially different from that which French audiences were one day to savour at the Châtelet.⁵

Valenciennes, to be sure, reached its peak long after the times we are now considering, and marks perhaps the acme of material splendour to which this drama attained. But it seems that, from the moment when an attempt was made to represent Hell Mouth, spectacle was insisted on, and was provided with ever-increasing lavishness, Smoke and flame there must surely be, to say nothing of monstrous jaws, gaping and snapping as they devoured the damned: such a Hell Mouth, at Mons, required the attendance of seventeen machinists. But to the *Maître des Feintes*, as that highly paid functionary came to be known, every event in Bible history that was of a supernatural character came as a challenge to his skill. There were traps for the fall of Lucifer and his associate rebels, traps for their re-emergence on the earthly scene. Major devils belched fire, minor ones carried squibs in their mouths, armpits and rumps. Gunpowder was requisitioned almost as soon as it was heard of, and was employed as joyously and innocently as by the Chinese before their enlightenment. Wrapped in parchment and set ablaze, it powerfully reinforced the burning resin which was used for conflagrations; under compression it exploded with a prodigious bang, very helpful in a mimic earthquake. But there were subtler marvels, for example the changing of the water into wine at Cana: what murex dye, or other tincture, did the *Maître des Feintes* have ready at the bottom of each cup, so that it coloured and darkened as it was filled?

If the effects at Valenciennes were on a par with the staging they may well have been, in the eyes of the beholders, not at all meretricious, but impressive. The Star of Bethlehem was, somehow, made radiant; so were the angelic apparitions that were revealed by the parting or rising of "real" clouds, with much use of ropes or wires, pulleys and winches: partisans of the scenic idea may note that with the arrival of such devices and their invisible manipulators "behind the scenes" became a perfectly proper expression, if he had thought of it, for the secret region in which the Master of Effects held sway. Very

strange these effects might appear to us, if we beheld them in the clear light of a summer afternoon; yet contemporary records inform us of one mimic saint at least whose glory shone like the sun. And, if we bear in mind the standard set by the carvers and painters of that age, we shall not scout the notion that even if these effects were to our understanding childlike they may also have been beautiful. For if the Archangel Michael, in full panoply of golden armour, sword and wings, was a familiar figure on the rood-screen, we may be sure that when the stage brought him to life it did its best to emulate that splendour.⁶

Certainly, when the emancipation from the church to the market-place began to yield dividends, there was no lack of means to do things handsomely. Even by commercial standards, the religious drama was a huge success. At Autun and Valenciennes—or for that matter at Bourges, where the *Actes des Apôtres*, of some sixty-two thousand lines, went on for forty days—they cannot have needed to skimp on the staging. Craftsmen by the score would see to this, and in those times craftsmanship went hand in hand with beauty. Yet the old pious purpose held; what mattered above all things, and more and more from the moment when a rudimentary liturgical drama had set the great movement going, was verisimilitude: every happenning must be so contrived that it seemed real.

In the matter of costume the purpose was the same. As in the orientation of the mansions, orthodox symbolism was adopted wherever helpful, but always a precise symbolism; the symbolism of a twilight drama would have had little meaning for an age that still feared the dark. Tails for devils, wings for angels, crowns for kings; and the Cross over all. For the rest, let every personage, holy or secular, appear as he would if we met him in the street; if, like Herod and the Magi, he is too grand or remote for that possibility, let us see him as we conceive him to have been. It will fortify our conviction that these happenings are real if the protagonists wear the clothes of our own day. In our setting of Paradise, it is true, we shall exhibit the Saved with a symbolic touch that excludes the baser part of their anatomy, shewing them only as far down as the shoulders. Let Adam and Eve, in their less happy case, have their nakedness simulated—not symbolised—by buckskin tights. The leather masks of the fiends can be fashioned with the same dreadful mirth (some examples are to this day more frightening than funny) that inspired the carving of the gargoyles. The Father himself, set on high, can be further isolated by gilding his face and putting on his hands

a very special pair of gloves. But from Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, the Doctors in the Temple, down to the Tormentors, all the characters of the great story that can be dressed as if they were of our time must be so dressed, if that will help us to believe in them.⁷

Mantzius contrasts, to its disadvantage, the "catchpenny actuality" of this drama with the sublime and conventional quality of the Greek. And certainly, in respect of speeches that "flow on in one monotonous strain without arresting the attention of the spectator by any salient features of character, expression or thought", he says no more than any student of the medieval texts will acknowledge. Text for text, character for character, idea for idea, the drama of the Middle Ages is not to be compared with the drama of Athens in its prime. But we are not sure to what extent the Greeks, when their sublime texts came to life on the stage, did in fact eschew catchpenny actuality. In painting, if the story of Zeuxis and Apelles is true, they favoured the *trompe l' œil* school.⁸ In the theatre, whatever the austerity of the poet's lines, we have to guess at the way they managed their theophanies and such from the derisive hoisting of Socrates in *The Clouds*, and we do not know what bloody display rolled forward when the doors opened in *The Agamemnon*. Moreover, Mantzius wrote this passage before it was generally known that the Greeks, of all people, were in the habit of tinting their chaste carvings very much in the manner of Madame Tussaud, and that Pallas herself, in the golden murk of the Parthenon, had painted lips and eyes.

The use and abuse of actuality is a problem for every artist who seeks to interpret life—which is to say all artists. In the theatre it is a problem that presents itself almost at every moment of a rehearsal, and by no means merely as a matter of staging or stage-properties. But to the medieval producer and playgoer alike actuality was a paramount consideration. The purpose, the holy purpose, of the plays was to make the story real, and real, by whatever material means, it must be made. In fact, one great difference between the drama of that time and ours is, that before it was enfranchised by the Renaissance the theatre's chief concern was to give actuality to divine happenings; and that since that great re-shaping of men's minds its concern has been to trace, hesitantly and by devious ways, the divinity in actual life.

Chapter 7

The Drama comes to England

IT IS DOUBTFUL whether English religious drama ever attained the outward splendour of Autun, or Bourges or Valenciennes. For some two centuries after the Conquest it was in the hands of French ecclesiastics and scholars, and was played in Latin. But on emerging from this tutelage it struck out a line of its own.

The earliest records are scant and unexciting. In the eleventh century the supposedly English Hilarius, a pupil of Abelard and domiciled in France, composed three plays, entirely in Latin but for some French refrains, on the subjects of Daniel, Lazarus and St Nicholas respectively; but it is not known that they were ever played on this side of the channel.¹ About 1100 a *Ludus de Sancta Katharina* was played at Dunstable under the direction of the Norman scholar Geoffrey, schoolmaster at the abbey of St Alban's; it is particularly remembered because certain vestments borrowed from the abbey were burned, and the penitent Geoffrey thereupon took vows, eventually becoming Abbot of that institution. There is some record of the performance of Miracles in London between 1170 and 1182. And not only were the clergy given to getting up such shows themselves, but it would seem that they delighted in entertainment of a less holy kind; for in 1258 there was a prohibition of the playing of *ludi histrionum* before abbots and monks, and there can be little doubt that the *histriones* were professional mimes, whether under the name of minstrels or not we cannot tell.²

It is to the laity, perhaps, as much as to the clergy that we owe the great cycles of religious drama that were to come into being within the next hundred years. In 1264 Pope Urban IV proclaimed the Feast of Corpus Christi, hitherto a local celebration, an annual festival throughout his dominions, in which dramatic performances of a sacred character might fittingly play their part.³ The Bull was confirmed after the Pope's death by the Council of Vienna in 1311.

In England one consequence of this pronouncement was that the religious drama passed from the hands of the Church into the hands of the people. The Thursday after Trinity Sun-

day—it is one of the longest days in the year—became a day of high festival. The Host was carried through the streets and exhibited at stopping-places along the route, in an imposing procession in which the municipal authorities and the trade guilds joined. These guilds were local organisations based on trade or craft whose purpose was, within the bonds of good citizenship, to protect their own interests, in this and other respects resembling a trade union but incorporating employers and employed. They were the backbone of the middle and of the upper working classes, and took an active part in the life of the community. In particular the Mysteries became an object of their zealous care, each guild contributing to the whole series the episode most appropriate to its skill and resources, as the Shipwrights the Flood, the Goldsmiths the Adoration of the Kings, the Vintners the Marriage-feast at Cana, the Bakers the Last Supper. But the procession of Corpus Christi inspired them to make the revolutionary experiment of a processional drama. The fixed multiple setting was, as it were, broken up into its component mansions, and these, mounted on wheels, passed in order through the town, halting at vantage-points along the route to play their plays; so that a spectator taking up his stand at any such point, or even hiring a window for himself and his family, had only to remain where he was to see the whole cycle in rotation.

In addition to the texts, practically complete, of the four great cycles of York, Chester, Wakefield and Coventry, there has come down to us a quantity of miscellaneous information in the form of rules, mayoral ordinances, banns and accounts. Many of them have now been made available to the general reader. In their mundane particularity they make vivid for us an England intellectually more remote than the Athens of Pericles; they are so bustlingly alive that when we encounter the archaisms and oddities of the plays themselves we are almost chillingly reminded how long ago this eager humanity faded into dust.

“We command”, say the Council of York in 1415, “of the king’s behalf and the Mayor”—honoured with a capital as Henry, in this year of Agincourt, is not—“and the sheriffs of this City that no man go armed in this City with swords . . . nor none other defences in disturbance of the king’s peace and the play . . . and that they leave their harness in their Inns . . . And that every player that shall play be ready in his pageant at convenient time, that is to say, at the midhour betwixt fourth and fifth of the clock in the morning, and then all other

pageants fast following each one after the other as their course is, without tarrying", adding in Latin, "Under penalty of 6s. 8d., to be imposed by the chamber." By the same proclamation they require "good players, well arrayed, and openly speaking"—mumblers need not apply. In 1476 they ordain "that yearly in the time of lenten there shall be called afore the mayor for the time being four of the most cunning discreet and able players within this City to search, hear and examine all the players and plays and pageants" in pursuit of worthy talent.⁴

The accounts also are eloquent. "Pageant silver", ranging from a penny to fourpence, was exacted from each guild member as his money contribution to the show, tribute was levied on strangers trading in the city, and pageant-masters were elected to control the spending. The figures were made public annually on the Sunday before midsummer, and were subject to close scrutiny. Here are a few items. If the reader wishes to calculate what the sums set down could buy in the way of things that support life or make it pleasantly supportable, he may learn from the Coventry accountants that as late as 1490 a rib of beef cost threepence and a quart of wine twopence. A pint of good beer could be had for a farthing; at York in 1584 it cost a halfpenny.

First, then, an often-quoted extract from the Coventry salary-list. It will be seen that the acting value of the part determines the reward, just as Shylock "carries" more than the Doge of Venice.

Imprimis to God, ijs.

Itm to Cayphas, iijs. iiijd.

Itm to Heroude, iij. iiid.

Itm to the devyll and to Judas, xviiid.

Three and threepence apiece for Caiaphas and Herod, two shillings for the Deity, eighteen pence apiece for Judas and the fiend.

Payment for rehearsal was made in kind, and came under the head of entertaining:

This is the expens of the furste reherse of our players in
Ester weke.

Imprimis in Brede, iiijd.

Itm in Ale, viiid.

Thirty-two pints; but the cast for this play was large.

Itm in Kechyn, xiiijd.

Itm in Vynegre, jd.

The expenditure for the next rehearsal is not itemised, and comes to a little more; an extra gallon of ale may account for this:

Itm payd at the Second Reherse in Whyttson weke, in brede, Ale and Kechyn, ijs. iiijd.

In the matter of wardrobe and properties—we are still at Coventry in 1490—an “Md” (memorandum) notes certain garments and other articles “that wer newe reparelyd a-gaynste Corpus Xpisti daye”. It enumerates them: four jackets of black buckram for the Tormentors, with nails and dice upon them; another four for Tormentors “of an-other suett”, with damask flowers; two more, of buckram with hammers crossed (the arms or badge of the Smiths’ Company); two “party jakketts” of red and black; a cloak for Pilate; a gown for Pilate’s son; a gown for the beadle; a hood for the beadle; two “burlettis” (? birettas); a crest for Herod; a “fawchon” for Herod; a hat for Pilate; a hat for Pilate’s son; two mitres for the Bishops; two hats for two Princes; four hats for the Tormentors; two more hats for the Tormentors; a pole-axe for Pilate’s son; a sceptre for Herod; a “masse”; a sceptre for Pilates’ son; four scourges and a pillar; two “cheverels gyld” for John and Peter; the Devil’s head. It ends with the statement that “the somme of all the costes and workemanschyp and colours draweth to xvs”.

Most vivid of all, perhaps, are the glimpses we get of the “pageants”, the wheeled “mansions” on and in which the plays were played:

Item for ij Iron lamps for the padgion, xd.

Item for byrkes and Resses (? birch and rushes) to the padgion, ijd.

Item to the laborer for takinge the clothes vp and doune, and nayles, iiijd.

Item to vjd. (? six) laborers for puttinge the padgion, ijs.

At Coventry in 1440 “cloth to lap abowt the pajent, payntyng and all” cost three-and-sixpence; in 1471 the “burneysshing and payntyng of the fanes” came to one-and-eightpence; in

1553 two shillings was paid "for payntyng of the pagent tope".⁵

"Pageant", spelt in a variety of ways and doubtfully traced back through the Latin *pagina* to the Greek *pegnumi*, to construct, was a word that came to be used indiscriminately for the movable stage and for the show given upon it, just as by "theatre" we may mean the building or the art; it is used to-day in a sense even further from its source. Our imagination cannot help focusing on this wheeled erection; we want to know exactly what it looked like. The description we generally rely on is that of Archdeacon Rogers,⁶ who saw the Chester plays in 1594; we have to remember that by that year Shakespeare had got well into his stride and the medieval drama was obsolescent, a carefully trimmed relic of the days of Popery; the apologetic tone of those "banes" of 1600 is a further reminder that Rogers did not see the Chester cycle in its heyday. The pageant, then, that he describes was a high scaffold with two rooms, a higher and a lower, upon four wheels; in the lower room, he says, the actors apparelled themselves and in the higher room they played, this upper room "being all open at the top, that all beholders might hear and see them". There is no mention of a canopy, although the use of the word "room" suggests a ceiling. Accordingly we may picture something like a gigantic Punch and Judy stand on wheels, with a stage for living actors to walk on, and the proscenium, sides and back removed. In such a case the "clothes" that the labourer nailed up can only have been the draperies that concealed the dressing-room below.

But it would be a mistake to assume that all pageants were at all times identical, either in construction or in size. A much smaller vehicle would suffice for the Annunciation than for the Last Supper. A canopy would be fitting for the throne of Herod, indeed a necessary protection against the weather; but it might be neither necessary nor convenient above the Ark. Nor, certainly, was the upper staging invariably open on all four sides. A miniature in the Bodleian Library shews an enclosed setting, fronted by something very like a proscenium.⁷ And here an interesting problem arises. Assuming as we must that the pageants were not all of uniform appearance, may we not conjecture that for certain indoor localities something in the nature of a "box-set" was used? Would not this have been even reasonable and likely in the staging, say of the Nativity? When the waxen effigies of Mary and the Child were set up in the church at Christmastide, would not the modeller have been tempted to frame them in surroundings that would

intensify the illusion? And when the figures came to life on the pageant boards, would not the populace have looked for the same pictorial treatment? Or let us consider the episode of the Last Supper, staged by the bakers: it was indeed for this play that the aforementioned "clothes" were used. We may imagine a grouping of the kind that we see in innumerable paintings, the long table extending for nearly the whole width of the pageant, a canopy above, and the sides as well as the front open to the view. But what of the Back? Who could wish to gaze on that spectacle from behind? Might not the artificers have felt the positive need for a background to their picture, and might not some of those "clothes" have supplied it? Herod has his throne and state, although he rages awesomely in the street as well; but, again, who wants to look at the back of a throne, and might not some hangings behind it have contributed to his splendour? When the Shepherds ransack the hovel of the sheepstealing Mak, will it not add enormously to the fun of the proceedings if the hovel is real, to the extent of having three walls as well as a roof? These questions are of concern to all who exercise their minds with the notion of an "all-round" stage. To answer them in the affirmative is to admit the existence, in that early time, of a convention of face-to-audience and back-to-audience from which in turn the scenic convention derives.

The problem is accentuated when we come to think of the "effects". When the guilds broke up, in a manner of speaking, the multiple stage of the Mysteries and carried the appropriate portions of it round the town, the public would have voted this new processional drama a poor thing if they had left their "effects" behind them. There is clear proof that they did not. Until—and it is not likely—evidence is forthcoming which falsifies all our conclusions in this matter, we are safe in believing that every pageant was a little travelling stage bearing its company, properties, setting of whatever kind and, beyond question, all apparatus necessary for the working of such mimic wonders as the play required. The texts, if read with understanding, have as much to tell us as the scanty stage-directions; together they leave us in no doubt. God is revealed, as in France, by the parting of the clouds. The fall of Lucifer is unmistakably a real fall through the floor of heaven into hell; a devout audience knew he was going to fall and expected him to do it to their satisfaction. Now the behind-the-scenes tackle by which these effects were brought to pass may have been in fact *below* the scenes, that is to say in the curtained-off cellarage of the pageant. Miraculous as-

cents from below might be contrived in this fashion without giving the secret away, but not miraculous descents from above. There are tricks no illusionist can attempt if he has an audience all round him, and there are many effects in these plays of which the working could not have been concealed from spectators standing in the rear. We cannot conceive of that disclosure of the Almighty between the opening clouds as anything but a *scenic* effect, addressed to an audience that confronted it. The suggestion, which must not be laboured, is simply this: that there were certain elements in the medieval drama which may have impelled it much further than we suppose in the direction of a picture stage.

As to the quality of these effects, we have seen that on the continent of Europe they were diverse and astonishing, splendid if not beautiful. In thunderbolts, earthquakes, supernatural radiance and the flames of hell, as in the designing and manipulation of pulleys, levers, ropes and winches, Europe held the palm. For the exercise of this fantastic art the pageant gave less scope. On the other hand we must be careful not to fall into either of the twin errors to which attention has already been drawn. We must not think of the medieval machinist as an oaf, whose attempts in this department were necessarily clumsy and absurd. But still less must we think of him as an innocent, whose unpolluted taste assured him that in the theatre it is always best to leave as much as possible to the imagination. For this, at whatever risk of clumsiness or absurdity, our theatre artificers of that time most definitely did not do. At least some of the secrets of the *Maître des Feintes* were known on this side of the channel, and one may suppose that the craftsmen who united in the building and beautifying of a great minster were not daunted when they were called on to handle trap-doors and red-fire. But the object of their pursuit, within the rules of their particular make-believe, was a material verisimilitude which left to the imagination not as much but as little as might be. If there was real water for the Deluge at Mons, there was "starch for the storm" at Coventry, not to mention a charge of fivepence for "setting the world on fire". Just as a real ark was put together (prefabricated, no doubt) before the eyes of beholders agog to learn more of that divinely inspired improvisation, just as the Kings on their conjecturally real "drombodaries" rode to Herod's real court and thence to a real Bethlehem, so also in the domain of the supernatural. The more miraculous the event to be shewn upon the boards, the greater the need, not only that itself should be stunning, but that the supporting

detail should be earthily real.

All this carries us a long way forward from the earlier notion that the pageant was a converted farm-cart with an upper flooring of rough timber. It was a substantial, expensive thing, built for its purpose and built to last (the York guilds paid a standard rent for storage); it was very large. The four wheels of Rogers' first description become six in a later edition; this is credible, but a six-wheeled vehicle would be a problem in a narrow, winding street. And when one thinks of the bulk, and weight, capacity of a haywain, or of the span of a timber-wagon, it seems likely that the limit as to size was set by the corners to be negotiated on the route. At least, the pageant at its biggest may well have been the size of a two-decker bus. The first glimpse of a carved and gilded superstructure as it swung into view; the lumbering progress, but immensely purposeful with its outriders, herald, escort and the straining team; the great object itself, as its nearer approach revealed it in its entirety, lurching over the cobbles and missing the shop-signs by inches—but never a squeak from the carefully soaped axles (item in accounts); with its cargo of properties and gadgets and its more or less identifiably human complement of angels, holy personages and black devils with fire works in their ears and tails; the arrival, to the sound of trumpets, at the appointed station, amid a turmoil of enthusiasm and profanity, jostling, eating and drinking; colour for which the most squeamish painter would put up with any affront to his nostrils; reek enough to challenge his endurance: all this must have been very exciting to behold. But it is time to consider the plays.

Chapter 8

The Great Cycles

THE DRAMA THAT had sprung from the four-line *Quem Quaeritis* now embraced the whole of Bible history. How completely this was covered by the cycles of York, Wakefield (Towneley), Chester and Coventry may be seen from the parallel columns in the appendix. It is on these cycles that we must concentrate, since through the happy chance of their survival they represent for us the culminating expression of an urge toward religious drama that was universal. Of the isolated plays in which that urge also found an outlet, it is safe to say that more are forgotten than are remembered. There were plays expository of the Paternoster, the Creed and the Sacrament, foreshadowing the Morality if not Moralities in fact, as was the York *Lord's Prayer*, suppressed in Protestant times by Archbishop Grindall and therefore lost. Of the cycles, too, some perished. There is a grocers' play of the Fall and Expulsion which is thought to belong to the vanished Norwich cycle; a shipwright's, not surprisingly of the building of the Ark, is ascribed to that of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Although the East and West Midlands take pride of place, the trail of the English miracles, processional or stationary, is to be found everywhere; from Edinburgh and Aberdeen to Dublin and down to Kilkenny; in Kendal, Lancaster, Preston, Worcester, Tewkesbury, Shrewsbury, Leicester; in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. South of London the passion for play-acting was less strong—a touring manager still looks for his biggest returns in the north. But in 1378 the scholars of St Paul's were seeking royal protection against inexpert representations of Bible history which spoilt their own market, and at the turn of the century the London clergy were active at Skinners Well in Smithfield.¹ The chronicler's word for their performances is *sumptuosus*, and as these ranged from the Creation to Doomsday and occupied anything from four to seven days in the playing, it would seem as though London had borrowed from York or had pieced together a cycle of its own. We have still the text, in Cymric, of a cycle that was played in distant Cornwall during this same century.

Of the four great English cycles the earliest is the York, conjecturally dated 1340–50. York, according to Miss Toul-

min Smith, whose researches in the Ashburnham manuscript made this cycle accessible to all, was from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century a play-loving city; and this series of forty-eight episodes surviving out of a total of fifty-seven is not only the first but the longest of all. It is likewise the gravest of all. It has a unity of style—recalling, some have thought, the contemporary poem *Cursor Mundi*²—that its successors lack. It may even be the work of one man: perhaps, to guess by the dialect, of a monk of north-country upbringing; but we remember also that in the arts of that time many hands could work as one. Its vast sweep extends from the Creation and the fall of Lucifer to the Day of Judgment; yet the action is not excessively diffuse, nor is the comedy allowed to get out of hand. Cain and Abel are more forcefully drawn in later cycles, and Noah's Wife (first of the dames) more racily. But in none is the bewilderment of Joseph presented with greater tenderness or discretion, and the realism of the Crucifixion is not brutal. Nor are this restraint and the sense of beauty it betokens the only virtues of the York cycle. The subsidiary characters, homely and recognisable types, are seen with a dramatist's eye, and it is a dramatist's feeling for form that marshals the whole story, delivering it at last, as has been well said, into the hands of God.

Next in date after the York comes the thirty-play Towneley cycle, so named from the family who long held the fourteenth-century text. It was at one time doubtfully ascribed to the canons of the Abbey of Woodkirk; from internal evidence it was certainly played at Wakefield, four miles to the south; for this reason it is also known as the Wakefield cycle. It has not the austerity of the York cycle, nor the unity; here perceptibly a number of authors were at work. It is more robust and of the earth, excelling in vivacity and a humour, the true comedic humour, very different from the half-horrific fooling of the Fiend, who is now less in evidence. The secular element is gaining ground. In one of the unknown authors who happened to be not only a poet but something of a comic dramatist, it asserted itself to such effect that the *Second Shepherd's Play* in the Towneley cycle, up to the moment when the Angel appears with his tidings, has been pronounced the first pure example of a one-act English comedy. Cain also, presented as a gross and bloody-minded thug, is funny; Mrs. Noah is very funny indeed. It is astonishing to find the Sybil ranking with the Prophets and following their appearance with a scene all to herself. A nameless poet gives some graceful and touching lines to Joseph, who in one aspect or another

seems never to have been an object of indifference to the medieval spectator; touching also are the humble offerings of the Shepherds. The Innocents are slain, one can only say, with gusto; but the same spirit brought to bear, with a wealth of hideous detail, on the scene at Calvary is misdirected, to our way of thinking.

Through a confusion of names (now resolved for us by Sir Edmund Chambers) in the banns of 1600, the cycle of Chester was formerly believed to be the oldest of all extant.³ It is now placed, after the York and a little later than the Towneley cycles, in the last years of the fourteenth century. It was played, not at Corpus Christi, but during three days at Whitsuntide. The York influence has been detected, although it does not wholly follow the York scenario; but the tone is more clerkly and less popular; not indeed throughout, for the Chester Deluge is as lively as any other treatment of that theme. But either ecclesiastical influences were more dominant here or the Chester guildsmen were peculiarly inclined to homiletics, for there are frequent moralisings by an Expositor or Doctor. At the expense of drama the didactic purpose is kept more steadily in view. There is less that jars on modern susceptibilities, notably so, compared with the Towneley, in the episodes of the Passion. There are twenty-five plays in this series.

The Coventry cycle dates from the second half of the fifteenth century. Its full name is *Ludus Coventriae sive Ludus Corporis Christi*, which with other evidence suggests that it was played not only in that city; moreover, it is written in the English of the north-east midlands, not of Warwickshire. There is a further uncertainty: in this cycle the episodes are not clearly separated one from another as if for pageant presentation, and doubt has arisen whether in fact they were so played. For there were other Coventry plays as well, coupled in the records with the guilds that enacted them, and it may be that the Coventry accounts already cited have reference to them—not to the *Ludus Coventriae*—when they note the painting of the pageant; indeed, that expenditure of three-and-six on its draping, painting and all, is dated 1440, twenty-eight years before the date inscribed on the script of the *Ludus*. Research may in time solve this problem.

In the forty-two plays of this cycle there are signs, as in the Chester plays, of priestly handling, as distinct from the handling of a monk or layman who was a poet too. The scene of the Disputation in the Temple suggests an author less intent on its dramatic possibilities than on nice points of doctrine,

not as a rule within lay comprehension. There is less liveliness here than in the earlier cycles, less fun, less coarseness, less drama; even Herod does not rave as full-throatedly as of yore. And it is worth noting that instead of the admonitory Expositor of the Chester plays we have here a number of no less admonitory Abstractions: *Contemplacio*, *Veritas*, *Misericordia*, *Iusticia*, *Pax*, all of whom, before 1468, were finding their appropriate place in the Morality. The Coventry cycle marks a transition.

In the same connection we should note the fragments of the Digby cycle, assigned to the northern and eastern midlands shortly before or after 1450. In one of them at least a mind of some originality is at work. Such readers as are growing impatient for the dawn of our secular drama should certainly not overlook the Digby *Magdalen*. For here is a very early attempt (but a very whole-hearted one) to portray a state of life that came to be known in the nineteenth-century theatre as Guilty Splendour. Before proceeding to the redemption of St Mary of Magdala the unknown author was permitted to shew her as she had been, *in gaudio*, that is to say enjoying herself in the most reprehensible manner, with no limit set provided hell-fire was covertly about her, biding its time. One would like to know whether the more rigid-minded were distressed to see how well these scenes went, or were puzzled because unaccountably they seemed to strengthen the whole work. As correctives we have again the Abstractions characteristic of the Morality. But also this remarkable play, which traces Mary's career from her infancy in the Castle of Maudleyn, has running through it a thread of fantastic allegory, such as was destined one day to inform a tinker's dream.

The lost fifteenth-century cycle of Beverly is reasonably supposed to have derived from the York. And assuredly it was York that set the standard: there are episodes in other cycles, notably the Wakefield, that are largely transcripts. When the city of York, not long ago, resolved to try what life there still might be in a drama that the Elizabethans held to be dead and done with, the positive reaction was sensational.⁴ York achieved, half a millennium before our time, a unity and homogeneity that its near contemporaries lack. If Wakefield, Chester and Coventry are now emboldened to challenge York, it is only on points that they can hope to win.

Chapter 9

The Plays and the Acting

THE READER WHO confronts for the first time these unfamiliar texts is likely to be more struck by their general resemblance than by any distinctions of date and provenance that learned critics have drawn, just as five hundred years hence men may fail to see much difference between the stage speech of to-day and that of the years before the first great war. But he may notice the gradual elimination of Norman-French, or its acclimatising through popular usage until it merges in English. "Bewsheres" (*beaux sieurs*) dies hard as a form of address to the audience, yet we still write "Messrs" when addressing a firm. Odd phrases will catch his eye, as remarkable as any expressions that were taken oversea by the Pilgrim Fathers and now came back to us on the American screen. When, with the help of the master of effects, the York Moses turns his rod into a snake, Pharoah exclaims "Hopp illa hayle!" Is this the houp-la of the circus? Is it of Saracen origin, an importation of some returned Crusader, as Tally-ho! may be the Arabic *Tala hina*? But at least he cannot fail to observe, as he passes from York through Wakefield and Chester to Coventry, the persistent trend toward the secular: the swinging of the focus from one kind of magic to another, while authority alternately resists and comes to terms, fighting always a rearguard action. It would seem that from the moment when three mimic Maries encountered a mimic Angel on guard beside a mimic Sepulchre the course was set. This history must deny itself the satisfaction of suggesting that at that moment a very ancient god stirred in his sleep and emitted a vinous chuckle, because it is part of this history's purpose to suggest that that particular god has never slept. Shall we simply say that when the Church, having inherited the anthropomorphic idea, sought to confirm its dominion by the further step of setting up images that were not only life-like but alive, it contracted a perilous alliance with the exponents of a magic older than its own?

The purpose of these plays was to establish and fortify belief, and the chief characters were divine. Nevertheless, to the simple people who played them they brought all the age-old

enchantments of let's-pretend: the liberation of the spirit that follows when, by the practice of an immemorial art, we shed for a little our troublesome selves and become somebody else. The somebodies of this drama were, not a few of them, Somebodies indeed, sacrosanct, invoked from on high to grace the boards of a pageant cart. But—and here was the magic of it—they could only appear by deputy and in terms of this world. Even the money spent on the deputy's clothing and equipment must be strictly accounted for; nor did that hard fact diminish the show in the general estimation, because according to the medieval view average man, leaving the Saints their raptures, could apprehend divinity much better if he kept both feet firmly on the ground. The lines of the Father might be intoned as impersonally as was thought fitting. But when the accounts were published everyone would know how much had been spent on the "skynnis of white leder" for His gloves and on the gold-leaf for His face, and the player, thus tired and gilded, was doubtless a well-known member of the community, not wrapped in the mystery of a player's calling. However dutifully he obliterated himself, if so instructed, he cannot have helped feeling that this was a momentous and thrilling act of impersonation. As to the Christ, what are we to suppose? He could hardly have been chosen for the part unless the light of faith was strong in him, and he may well have moved through the scenes of the Passion exalted, breathing an air not of this world and tasting the enchantment of make-believe at its highest power of all. But not otherwise are great players inspired; we cannot get away from it: even the Christ was *acting*.

Moreover, however godly the intent, humanity would keep breaking in, like the cheerfulness that disturbed Boswell's philosophically-inclined friend. However toilsome, the getting-up of these shows was immense fun. And whenever the script afforded a chance for purely secular acting we may be sure that the players exploited it to the limit of their skill—how could they forbear to? As for Mary herself, serene, tender, sensible and prim—it is her voice of all that sounds most clearly from the page as you read—either Mary was ill-played or she was adorable in the word's less grave meaning. The Wakefield Joseph is the embodiment of delicacy, as simple a gentleman as Colonel Newcome; in certain other cycles a heavier handling of his predicament reminds us a little of the aggrieved husband in Roman farce; but always he is alive and playable. So are the Shepherds, mounting guard over their sheep and unpacking their bulging satchels of provender. So

are the Kings, debating their travel arrangements and not forgetting the "rewlys of astronomy" as they ride toward the Star; so are the Doctors, questioning Jesus in the temple; so are the scores of subsidiary characters, nearly all of them comic, with which a dramatic imagination could not forbear to decorate the main theme. When it came to the villains of the piece no trammels of decorum were imposed, and the pay-roll shews how high they ranked in acting value. There is nothing here that we can call delicate or subtle, although in the character of Pilate the writers seem to have divined a complexity that eluded their grasp. Herod is not even villainy drawn in the round, he is at once fearful and preposterous and is surely meant to be; for Chaucer's Jolly Absolon, who sometimes played him, he was a bravura part. But as a two-dimensional flaring banner of villainy he is colossal. There is the germ of Tamburlaine in his brag; nay, if we searched the plays we might chance on the obscure ancestry of Pistol, of Mrs. Quickly, of Silence and the Recruits. The cycles confront us with a great gallery of parts, all asking to be played; only awaiting the devised clash—and now and then it very nearly was devised—that is drama.

Modern attempts to imitate these plays are for the most part epicene, numb with reverence and pallid with the pastel shades of unbelief. We cannot think with the mind of those days, and putting the clock back is a fruitless proceeding. Yet we are beginning to make the surprising discovery that that far-away mind has still, through the plays, something to say to us; we are beginning to revive them. It is all to the good that we should do so. When we have reconciled ourselves to a rather limited vocabulary that will sometimes need translating, and have blue-pencilled a number of wearisome repetitions, we shall find (as they have found at York) that here is matter of the kind that can be made to stir great audiences. In the verse we shall find every quality that we look for in dramatic poetry: vigour, tenderness, magniloquence, exaltation and humour; at moments there is even a most happy economy of phrase. As the lines were written to be spoken, the approach must be made by way of the ear.

First, as to vigour. Here, slightly modernised in spelling, is the York Lucifer, exultant before his fall. Let the experimenter forswear the cult of the exquisite word, and get himself into a proper state with the help of a bottle of Burgundy and, say, Swinburne at his least inhibited, or even some thoroughly noisy Kipling. Then let him spout this, in broad Yorkshire,

pounding the alliterations and with a good beat and swing, whether he understands it all or not:

All the mirth that is made is markéd in me,
The beams of my brightness are burning so bright;
And I so seemly in sight of myself now I see,
For like a lord am I left to lend in this light:
More fairer by far than my feres,
In me is no point that may pair;
I feel me fetys and fair;
My power is passandë my peers.

A few lines later, in counterpoint to the choiring of the Seraphim, he lays claim to the throne of heaven:

There shall I set myself, full seemly to sight,
To receive my reverence through right of renown;
I shall be like unto Him that is highest on height:
Ow! what I am derworth and deft . . .!

There is a space in the script here: it is the cue for the winches. We must imagine a change of tone for the awful words that follow:

OW! DEUCE!! ALL GOES DOWN!!!

The rest is howling and recrimination.

Here are some lines from the Chester Deluge. The Ark may well have been "real". But the problem of getting the animals into it was, as we believe, met by painting their effigies on boards, which were clapped to the vessel's side by the speakers of the lines; the stage directions insist most understandably that the boards shall be arranged in their proper order, so that when they are produced and exhibited they shall correspond to the animals named. If the verse is made to go at a brisk jog-trot with plenty of emphasis, we do indeed get something of the bustle of an embarkation:

SEM (<i>sic</i>)	Sir, here are lyons, libardes in, Horses, mares, oxen and swine, Goates, calves, sheeps and kine Here sitten thou may see.
HAM	Camels, asses, men may finde, Bucke, doe, harte and hynde,

And beastes of all manner kinde

Here bene, as thinkes me.

IAPHET

Take here cattles and doggs to(o),

Otter, fox, fulmart also,

Hares hopping gaylie can goe

Have cowle here for to eate.

The wives of Noah and his sons take up the tale:

UXOR NOE

And here are Beares, wolfes sett,

Apes, owles, marmoset,

Weasels, squirrels and firret;

Here they eaten their meat.

UXOR SEM

Yet more beastes are in this howse:

Here cattis maken it full crowse,

Here a ratten, here a mowse,

They stand nigh together.

UXOR HAM

And here fowles, less and more:

Hernes, cranes and byttour,

Swans, peacockes and, them before,

Meate for this weather.

Crooners must not be dispirited by the discovery that weather and together had been pounced on for lyrical purposes before they were born or thought of. Now comes Japhet's wife:

UXOR IAPHET

Here are cockes, kites, crowes,

Rookes, ravens—many rows,

Duckes, curlewes—who ever knowes

Each one in his kinde?

And here are doves, diggs(?), drakes,

Redshanks running through the lakes;

And each fowle that led den makes

In this shipp men may finde.

It is at this moment that Uxor Noe herself declines to come on board. Her reason for this varies, according to the cycle in which she appears; it is, however, always important in her view and extremely trivial in the view of her husband and of God; she is evidently intended to exemplify the dilatoriness of her sex. In one version at least she is walloped into the Ark by her husband; at Chester the altercation between them is shorter than most, and more restrained. Meanwhile Sem, Ham, Iaphet and their wives were no doubt breathing more

freely for having got this formidable catalogue off their minds and the appropriate placards, we hope, attached to their vessel's hull; was Uxor Iaphet's "who ever knows . . .?" given her as cover for any final confusion of the boards that might arise? Or was the local designer uncertain what all these birds were like, and content himself with indicating a number of indeterminate wildfowl on a single board, for Uxor Iaphet to dispose of, quickly, before she scuttled from the scene?

Here, as an example of delicacy, is the Wakefield (Towneley) Joseph; he has returned from a long absence on business to find that Mary is unaccountably with child. In the stanza that follows "carefull" does not mean cautious, but gravely foreboding, full of care:

JOSEPH I irke full sore with my lyfe,
 That ever I wed so young a wyfe;
 That bargain may I ban.
 To me it was a carefull dede;
 I myght well wyt that yowthede
 Would have lykyng of man.

There follows a short scene in which he reproaches Mary gently; left to himself he continues:

I left thaym in good peasse wenyd I;
Into the contre I went on hy,
 My craft to use with main;
To gette oure lyfying I must mede;
On Marie I prayed them take good hede
 To that I cam agane.

Neyn monethes was I fro that myld;
When I cam home she was with chyld;
 Alas, I said, for shame.
I asked ther women who that had done,
And thay me sayde an angell sone,
 Syn that I went from hame.

An angell spake with that wyght,
And no man els, bi day nor nyght:
 "Sir, thereof be ye bold".
Thay excusyd hir thus sothly
To make hir clene of hir foly,
 And babyshed me that was old. . . .

We have no means of knowing whether the Wakefield Joseph played at this point, as they say, for comedy—which it is likely he did elsewhere—or whether he ventured to touch the heartstrings of his audience as the lines themselves might do. Wiser, perhaps, not to set them laughing at him, in view of what is to come. For it now occurs to him that the gossips might not have been putting him off with baby-talk but were speaking the truth: that a miracle has in fact befallen. If so—and this is where the Joseph, if he knew his business, made everyone want to hug him—even the reflection of that glory is not for so obscure a person as himself; as the possibility dawns on him his heart falters:

And sothly, if it so befall
Godys son that she be with all,
If such grace myght betyde,
I wote wll that I am not he
Which that is worthi to be
That blyssed body besyde,

Nor yit to be in company;
To wyldernes I will for this
Enfors me for to fare;
And neuer longer with hir dele;
But styly shall I from hir stele,
That mete shall we no mare.

He is about to suit the action to the word when Gabriel intervenes, from whom he learns the truth, and that it is God's will that he shall stay and look after Mary: Joseph is exalted:

A, lord, I lofe the all alon,
That vowches safe that I be oone
To tend that child so ying;
I that have thus ungrathly gone,
And untruly taken upon
Mary, that dere darlyng.

I rewe full sore that I have sayde,
And of hir byrdyng hir unbrade,
And she not gyilty is;
Forth to hir now will I wne
And pray hir for to be my freynde,
And aske hir forgyfnes.

But at this moment Mary enters:

A, Mary wyfe, what chere?

MARY The better, sir, that ye ar here;
Thus long where have ye lent?
JOSEPH Certys, walkyd about, lyke a fon
That wrangwysly hase taken upon:
I wyst neuer what I ment;

But I wrote well, my lemman fre,
I have trespass to God and the;
Forgyf me, I the pray.

MARY Now all that ever ye sayde me to
God forgyf you, and I do,
With all the myght I may.

Let us hope the Wakefield Mary spoke that with a true voice
and a true heart. The last lines are Joseph's:

A, what I am light as lynde!
He that may both lowse and bynde
And every mys amende,
Leyn me grace, powere, and myght
My wyfe and hir swete yong wight
To kepe, to my lyfs ende.

In a magniloquence (of a sort) the Chester Herod can hardly be outclassed. Chester exhibits him, one must own, in what might be termed his Lower Fourth aspect; if the statelier metre of the York cycle links him tenuously with Tamburlaine, Chester foreshadows nothing more mature than the vein of King Cambyzes:

I king of kinges, none so keene,
I soveraigne Syre, as well is seene,
I Tyrant, that may both take and teene
Castle, tower and towne.
I weilde this world withouten wene,
I beat all those unbuxon beene,
I dryve the Devills all by deene
Deepe in hell a-downe.

For I am king of all mankinde,
I byd, I bet, I loose, I bynde;
I maister the Moone: take this in minde
That I am most of might . . .

It is a pity that the second half of this powerful stanza is lost, but he goes on:

I am the greatest above degree
That is or was or ever shall be:
The Sonne it dare not shyne on me
If I byd hym goe downe;
No rayne to fall shall none be free,
Nor no Lord have that liberty
That dare abide, and I bid flee,
But I shall cracke his crowne.

His end, at Chester, is melancholy but thrilling; he repents too late and is removed by fiends:

Alas! what the devill! is this to mone?
Alas! my days be now done;
I wott I must dye soone,
For damned must I be.
My legges rotten and my armes,
I have done so many harmes
That now I see of feendes swarmes
From hell coming for me.
I have done so much woe,
And never good sith I might go,
Therefore I see now cominge my foe
To fetch me to hell.
I bequeath here in this place
My soule to be with Sathanas:
I dye, I dye, alas! alas!
I may no longer dwell.

Tunc, says the stage direction, *moritur*; deservedly, and with the gloating approval of the spectators—except perhaps of some moody 'prentice to whom such an end seems a price worth paying for so much power and splendour here on earth. For one cannot see Herod tamely played. The part is impossible without the uplifting touch that actors used to call a bit of the old. Who in fact received that three-and-threepence for playing it at Coventry? It is the highest fee recorded, Caiaphas ranking level: but anyone could play Caiaphas. Was this a special engagement? Were jolly Absolon's lightness and mastery not always forthcoming; and dare we wonder whether Herod sometimes afforded the disinherited professional a chance to strut again upon the stage? "Deep in hell a-downe" offers vocal opportunities to experience that are beyond the

imagining of an amateur; this is a part for Mr. Vincent Crummies.

Here, as an instance of exaltation, are some of the Hosannas from the York *Entry into Jerusalem*. The circumstances of the borrowing, and returning, of the Ass have been punctiliously recorded.

Hayll! prophette, proven withouten pere,
Hayll! prince of peace schall ever endure.
Hayll! Kyng comely, curtese and clere,
Hayll! soverayne semely, to synful sure:
 To the all bowes.
Hayll! lord lovely, oure cares may cure;
 Hayll, Kyng of Jewes. . . .

Hayll! florishand floure that nevere shall fade,
Hayll! vyolett vernand with swete odoure,
Hayll! marke of myrthe, oure medecyne made,
Hayll! blossome bright: Hayll! oure socoure,
 Hayll! Kyng comely;
Hayll! menskfull man, we the honnoure
 With herte frely. . . .

Hayll! sonne ay schynand with bright bemes,
Hayll! lampe of liff schall neuer waste,
Hayll! lykand lanterne luffely lemes,
Hayll! texte of trewthe the trew to taste:
 Hayll! kyng and sire,
Hayll, maydens chylde that menskid hir maste,
 We the desire.

Hayll! domysman dredful, that all schall deme,
Hayll! quyk and dede that all schall lowte,
Hayll! whom worschippe most will seme,
Hayll! whom all thyng schall drede and dowte:
 We welcome the.
Hayll! and welcome of all abowte,
 To owre cete.

Note, if you like, the technical skill which varies the stress within the frame of the rhythm; but above all listen to it, with the mind's ear.

Incidental comedy abounds. But here are some passages

from the *Second Shepherds' Play* in the Wakefield cycle, a little modernised and with some stage directions added. It is a nasty night, and the Shepherds have found what shelter they can on the moor when they are joined by Mak, a shady local character whom they suspect of designs on their sheep. Accordingly, when they turn in they insist on his lying between them. As soon as they are asleep he extricates himself, puts a spell on them, secures a fat sheep and takes it home to his shrewish wife Gill. Rapture tempered by anxiety: it is a hanging matter, and the Shepherds are sure to enquire at the hovel and hear the animal bleating. Mak is non-plussed, but Gill has an idea. She will swaddle the sheep, hide it in the cradle, and "lie beside in childbed and groan". Mak, delighted, rejoins the Shepherds, and is just in time to wake up when they do, having dreamt, he says (paving the way), that his wife was delivered of a child. He hurries home.

MAK The last word they said when I turned my back,
They would look that they had all their sheep
[in the pack,

But thou must do as thou hight.

MAK (tucking her up) I will.

Hearken thou when they call; they will come anon.

Sing Lullay thou shall, for I must groan,
And cry out by the wall on Mary and John
Full sore—

Sing thou Lullay fast
When thou hear them at last,
And but I play a false cast
Trust me no more.

Meanwhile the Shepherds have discovered their loss, and with one accord are making for the cottage. As they draw near there is an uproar of groans and lullabies within.

3RD SHEP. Will ye hear how they hack? Our Sire, list how
they croon!

1ST SHEP. Heard I never crack so clean out of tune.
Call on him.

2ND SHEP. Mak! Undo your door soon.

(Mak peers out into the darkness)

MAK Who is that spoke as it were noon
Aloft?

Who is that, I say?

3RD SHEP. Good fellows, were it day.

MAK *(earnestly)* As far as ye may,
Good now, speak ye soft. . . .

He explains the domestic situation. Suddenly he affects to recognise them and asks them in; they are reluctant and suspicious, and decline his proffered hospitality.

MAK I would ye ate ere ye goed; methinks that ye
sweat.

2ND SHEP. Nay, neither mends our mood, drink nor meat.

MAK Why, sir, ails you aught but good?

3RD SHEP. *(eyeing him)* Yea, our sheep that we gat
Is stolen by the road; our loss is great.

MAK Sirs, drinkys! *(He produces ale)*

Had I been there

Some should have bought it full sore—

1ST SHEP. *(drily)* Marry, some men trows that ye were;
And that *us* forthinkys.

2ND SHEP. *(deliberately)* Mak, some men trows that it
should be ye.

3RD SHEP. Either ye or your spouse, so say we.

MAK *(outraged)* Now, if ye have suspowse to Gill or
me,

Come and search our house, and then ye may see
Who had her
Or there be any kine
Or sheep, of thine or mine—
And Gill my wife here lyen
Syn that she laid her!
(*Working himself up and pointing to the cradle*)
As I am true and leal, to God here I pray
That *this* be the first meal that I shall eat this
day!

But it is of no use; the Shepherds press into the cottage, to
Gill's great scandal.

GILL Out, thieves, from my bairn; come him not near!
MAK Wist ye how she had farne, your hearts would
be sore;
You do wrong, I you warn, that come thus
before
A women that has borne—but I say no more.
GILL (*ad misericordiam, screaming*)
Aiee! my middle!
I pray to God so mild,
If ever I you beguiled,
That I eat this child
That lies in this cradle!

The Shepherds search the premises fruitlessly. There is
nothing for it but to apologise, although the Third Shepherd
still suspects.

1ST SHEP. Mak, friends will we be, for we are at one.
MAK (*hurt*) I would have none of ye, for amends get
I none.
Farewell all three; full well were ye gone.
3RD SHEP. (*as they move away from the door*)
Fair words there may be, but love is there none
To spare.
1ST SHEP. Gave ye the child anything?
2ND SHEP. (*shortly*) I trow not one farthing.
3RD SHEP. (*with an idea*) Fast again will I fling—
Abide ye me there.

(*He returns to the cottage, and MAK reappears,
still very hurt; the Third Shepherd proceeds
with guile*)

3RD SHEP. Mak; take it no grief if I come to thy bairn.
 MAK Nay, thou does me great reпреfe, and foul hast
 thou farne.
 3RD SHEP. The child will it not grieve, that little day-starn:
 Mak, with your leave, let me give your bairn
 But six pence—
 MAK (*nervously*) Nay, do way—he sleepys—
 3RD SHEP. (*pressing*) Methinks he peepys—
 MAK (*frantic*) When he wakens he weepys—
 I pray you go hence—

(*But the Third Shepherd thrusts past him to the
 cradle*)

3RD SHEP. Give me leave him to kiss, and to lift up the
 Clout—
 WHAT THE DEVIL IS THIS? HE HAS A
 LONG SNOUT!

When Mr. Nugent Monck revived the play, early in the present century, it was at this point that pandemium broke loose, in one of the most murderous free-fights ever shewn on the stage. By a stroke of inspiration the action was not allowed to cool, but went straight to the *Gloria in Excelsis*, which rang out over the tumult and stilled it; and the Angel appeared. When he had done speaking there was a solemn hush, and the brawlers, abashed but uplifted and mysterious at one, forgot their quarrel and turned their faces towards Bethlehem:

2ND SHEP. Go we now, let us fare; the place is us near.
 3RD SHEP. I am ready and yare: go we in fear
 To that bright.
 Lord, if thy will it be,
 We are lewd all three;
 Grant us of thy glee
 To comfort thy wight.

Of economy and felicity in phrasing there are many instances. Here is one from the Chester cycle. Jesus is speaking to Simon the Leper. "Manner" should of course be stressed as to the second syllable and spoken to rhyme with "hair".

Symon, thou demes soothly, I-wisse;
 See thou this woman that here is?

Sicker she hath not done amisse
To work in this manner.
Into thyne howse here thou me geet;
No water thou gave to my feet;
She washed them with her teares weet,
And wyped them with her hear.

Chapter 10

Moralities and Interludes

MENTION HAS ALREADY been made of the *York Lord's Prayer*, dating from the later thirteen-hundreds. It was suppressed in Protestant times (1572) by Archbishop Grindall, and is lost. But we know that it presented the Virtues and Vices as personified abstractions contending for the soul of Man: a Morality, in short, according to our classification.

The first Morality extant is *The Castle of Perseverance*, assigned to the early years of the fifteen century. In this play Man, typified as *Humanum Genus* and appearing first as newborn, naked and helpless between his Good and Bad Angels, encounters the personifications of the World, the Flesh and the Devil and of the Seven Deadly Sins. The Bad Angel prevailing, the Good summons Confession and Shrift; Repentance lends further aid, and *Humanum Genus* is placed in protective custody in the Castle of Perseverance. The Sins assail the Castle, and the Virtues repel them with volleys of roses, the emblem of the Passion. The World then invokes the help of Avarice, since *Humanum Genus* is now advanced in years and avarice is the vice of old age. But money avails not against the approach of Death; and in the end *Humanum Genus* is arraigned before the Judgment Seat, where his case is argued between Mercy, Justice, Truth and Peace, and the appeal of Mercy wins the day. To us, the play's prolixity defeats its purpose; it can hardly have been got through in less than four hours; but it was elaborately mounted, and an audience avid of improvement may have been more gripped by it than we should be.¹

In the play of *Mind, Will and Understanding* (c. 1450), otherwise known by Dr. Furnival's title *A Morality of the Wisdom that is Christ*, the same general characteristics appear. The Mind, Will and Understanding of Anima, the soul, are corrupted by Lucifer, to the undoing of Anima, who re-enters "in the most horrible wyse" as the mother of a brood of devils who swarm beneath her skirts; her erstwhile purity is restored eventually by Wisdom, revealed as Christ. Here again is a heavily didactic work, but the tedium is relieved a little by processions of the Five Senses and other abstractions. In *Man-kind* (c. 1450) it is Mercy that appears as Man's protecting

power and confronts Mischief who, with Naught, New Guise and Now-a-days—personifications of worldliness in one aspect or another—tries in vain to corrupt him, until Tittivillus (a Wakefield devil, be it noted) succeeds in doing so by means of a dream. Man, however, duly repents and is saved by Mercy, and the tempters descend to hell. In *The World and the Child* (c. 1500) there is a variation in one respect, for Man is given a different name at every stage of his earthly pilgrimage. He appears first as Infans, and the World names him Wanton. In adolescence he becomes Love-Lust-and-Liking. Grown up, he is Manhood, and is commended to the service of seven kings who are in fact the Deadly Sins. Folly leads him astray until he is styled Age, and thereafter Shame. Conscience and Perseverance preserve him until, finally, under the name of Repentance, he is at peace with God.

The dramatic spark is kindled by friction. Drama begins to stir when the playwright, having set before us certain recognisable human types, proceeds to involve them in some kind of conflict with each other: without conflict there can be no drama. Now in all these plays it is obvious that from first to last there is a kind of conflict going on, and in this respect it may be said that the Morality comes nearer to true drama than the enacted narrative of the Miracle. On the other hand this conflict is less a clash of persons than of abstractions, of ideas. Indeed the Morality is the prototype of that Drama of Ideas for which rather extravagant claims were made at the beginning of the current century, with this distinction however: that while the Drama of Ideas was content to end with an argument made good, or even tossed away on a sea of dialectics, the Morality honestly strove to end with a human destiny fulfilled. If it attained the heights at which truth and beauty stand revealed as one, it could become beyond question a work of dramatic art. But at any lower level it was subject to the same temptation that plagued the Drama of Ideas: to employ puppets, thinly or richly disguised, that moved in obedience to the will of their manipulator. It is with these reflections in mind that we have to guess what forces brought the Morality to life and why, after yielding a few considerable works and one outstanding masterpiece, it was destined to wither and perish.

As to the first question, we must not think of our half-formed drama, even in that supposedly static age, as a child who did not want to grow up; the texts are evidence to the contrary. Nor need we impute sinister motives to the universally acknowledged authority that sought to direct, not to curb,

its growth. Nevertheless the Morality bears unmistakably the mark of an authoritarian hand. It made its appearance when the Miracles were an established institution in the charge of a devout and lusty laity. They were still dependent, no doubt, on clerkly writers, and referable to the priesthood on points of doctrine or procedure; but they had become a popular show, not necessarily scandalous to authority but a bother none the less, since the populace did not always enjoy them for the reasons that authority would prefer. This drama with a purpose had become vulgarised to a point at which it was ceasing to serve that purpose; the crowd at the pageant-stations had not only taken Mary and Joseph to its heart, but Herod and Lucifer as well. Yet every individual comprised in that crowd was aware of himself as a bone of contention betwixt good and evil; might not the personifications of the Virtues and the Sins prove even more edifying than these familiar characters of holy writ? Of them the guildsmen had made an enthralling entertainment. But a drama of Abstractions, now; there was something surely to be contrived within the confines of a cloistered life; it was a notion very inviting to anyone who was more at home with human conceptions than with human beings. Surely there was no risk of vulgarisation here?

But the popular urge to act, or to watch acting, proved stronger than the authoritarian urge to edify. Obstinate the trend toward the secular continued. The Miracles had called on Man simply to believe, and the personages he was required to believe in held the centre of the stage. But when the Morality assumed the direction of his soul, telling him what he ought to become and do instead of shewing him beings to wonder at and love, Man, like poor Jo when Mr. Chadband preached at him, had no choice but to occupy that conspicuous position himself, very ingloriously at first, as the sport of contending abstractions. It does not seem to have occurred to the promoters of the moral play that certain of these abstractions, as theatre-magic got to work on them, must tend more and more to become human themselves. In the Miracle the principals were divine, and the secular and infernal characters shared responsibility for the comic relief. In the Morality, while in one fashion or another the devils' were still called on to assist, the personified abstraction became a leading part. It must fight—he must fight—actively and convincingly for possession of the soul of Man. Now, considered as a part, there is not much to be done with a personified Cardinal Virtue beyond playing him as tremendously good in some not clearly defined way. But if you have the luck to be cast as a Deadly Sin, you will,

if you are of actor-stuff, at once know what to do the parts of Gluttony, Avarice or Lechery call insistently for the representing of a glutton, a miser or a harlot. Aristotle himself expressly indicates that our fleshier vices are matter for comedy rather than for tragedy, inviting purgation by laughter, not by tears and shudders; it would be difficult, when one comes to think of it, to write or play a tragedy of overeating. Some at least of the Sins, once they were embodied in human form, were bound to become human characters, and funny ones. The promoters of the Morality made, in the event, an involuntary contribution to English comedy.

As to the second question: why did the Morality die? The instance of *Everyman* (and that was a late flowering) forbids us to say that it died of its own exceeding dullness. Rather it died—disintegrated is a better word—because in practice it found itself unable to be quite as dull as it was meant to be. Unlike the Miracle, it could not afford to be perfectly faithful to its purpose. That purpose was soberly didactic; very rarely was the Morality fired by the white heat of faith that great preachers know. How could it impose its more temperate homilies on a multitude to whom the Passion of Christ was an ever-present reality, save by calling to its aid all manner of secular allurements with which it really had no concern?

There was for example the matter of staging. The processional, episodic drama of the pageants had not made an end of the older Miracle setting. When, as in Cornwall and elsewhere, a cycle was played in one appointed place, the multiple stage was still used. The Morality did not lend itself to the pageant system; the elaborate lay-out for *The Castle of Perseverance*, of which a sketch has come down to us, suggests that it adopted, at first, the method of the stationary Miracle. Yet it did so at a certain disadvantage which always attends symbolic treatment on the stage; it fell between allegory and actuality. No Castle of Perseverance could strike the imagination of the populace as Hell Mouth could, or the Stall at Bethlehem; no emblematic roses could have the validity of the scourges and the nails. The Morality, as a drama of ideas, should have been more hindered than helped by scenic embellishment. What it did need was acting. But here again it was in a dilemma, torn between what it ought to be and what it must be, if it was to hold an audience. When it supplanted the ready-to-hand characters of Bible history with personified abstractions, virtues and vices, it unwittingly cleared the way for the return of the immemorial Mime. When, having distributed the Deadly Sins among seven expert performers, it

replaced the gunpowder imps of the Miracle with an embodiment of ubiquitous devilry whom it called the Vice,² it gave the eternal Fool his chance; but what business had the Morality with a Fool? Yet unless the Morality was to preach a very dry sermon indeed it could not dispense with acting and clowning, to say nothing of songs and dances. Nor was the clowning always confined to the clowns. In *Mankind* the part of Mercy is treated with such scant respect (she is made to talk comic Latin) as to suggest that her author did not take the Morality altogether seriously.

In short, this facing-both-ways drama could not for very long stay poised between the sacred and the secular. From the moment when it allowed a Deadly Sin to become a human being it was, by its own stern code, on the downward path. More and more it must incline toward the secular, and that development must inevitably lead to its own decay. Yet not before the succession was assured. The child of the Morality was the Moral Interlude. The child of the Moral Interlude was the Interlude *tout court*. And before that promising infant was far advanced in years the actors, emerging from obscurity, had taken charge of it.

More than once in these pages we have played with the fancy—there are no grounds for stating it as a fact—that although the Miracles were the close preserve of the Guilds they sometimes offered opportunities to the kind of minstrel who was what we should call an actor. That three-and-three-pence for the Coventry Herod: was it the honorarium of an amateur, or the pay of a professional? A later chapter will try to suggest how, in the course of centuries, the actor came to re-establish himself in his own especial quality. Meanwhile, there are two points to be borne in mind. One is that in the years when the secular Interlude was taking shape small parties of strolling players were beginning to range the countryside. Another is, in the illuminating words of Sir Edmund Chambers, that the drama was now moving from the marketplace to the banquet-hall.

The Moral Interlude, free of the symbolic castles and what-not of the Morality, required nothing more than a handful of actors and as much gear as could be strapped on the back of a packhorse, or at most carried in a cart. Contemporary texts insist again and again that this or that part can be "doubled" with another, the writer thinking more, perhaps, of a shortage of amateur talent than of the natural reluctance of professionals to reduce their respective shares by adding to their

number. The same ingenuity could be brought to bear on the wholly secular Interlude, whose purpose was not to edify but to give delight. In the hands of the Players of Interludes, still in the category of Minstrels and not yet Actors, this was the inevitable destiny of the Morality's offspring.

From the market-place to the banquet-hall: it is indeed a suggestive phrase. Local authority was becoming aware of the hardy professional stroller with his light equipment, his repertoire and his skill. He could play anywhere within an hour's notice; on the green, in the inn-yard, the moot-hall or the church. But if authority demurred he had a trump up his sleeve. Not far away, if he had planned his tour judiciously, was always the great house. Whatever the burgesses might think of him, there at least he could look for shelter, food, a fee, and an invitation to display his art. It became customary for the great house, whether the town welcomed or forbade him, to extend this hospitality to the stroller. But to enjoy it he must have regard to the sort of play the great house wanted. Certainly interminable homiletics and allegory would not do: no castles here; at most a screen, a gallery and a cleared space on the hall floor. If he must edify, it were better that the edification should be freely interspersed with fun; best of all, perhaps, if he could keep his patrons laughing all the evening. Short plays (they would say) are what we need

To wear away the long age of three hours
Between our after-supper and bedtime.

Theseus exemplified perfectly the great house's view of what an Interlude should be when he glanced at the scroll presented him and elected for *Pyramus and Thisbe*: tedious and (but) brief. The multitude might endure to be improved hour after hour in the open air, wet or fine; the well-dined gentlefolk by the fireside could not.

This promotion in the social scale may partly account for the fact that even the Interlude whose purpose was to edify caught, quickly for those times, the whiff and wind of the Renaissance. One indication of this is a change in the names of the Abstractions. New horizons are becoming visible, perilous ones perhaps. For the in moral *Interlude of Hicke-Scorner* (unbeliever) it is a *travelled* libertine, bringing subversive notions from abroad, who helps Free Will and Imagination (both reprobate characters) to put Pity in the stocks. In John Rastell's *Nature of the Four Elements*—an excellent example of an Interlude designed to instruct as well as to edify, and dated

precisely 1517 by a reference to the discovery of America twenty years before—we are introduced to Studious Desire and Experience, who urge Humanity to the pursuit of Science; and the opposed tempters (tempters still, by the way) include not only Ignorance and Sensual Appetite but also a Taverner, no abstraction but unregenerate flesh and blood that any comedian might rejoice in; and this play ends on a note of practical compromise that chimes well with Humanism. In John Redford's *Wit and Science* (c. 1540) we have Father Reason, without whose help Science is impotent, and the conflict here is with Idleness, Tediousness (meaning boredom?) and Ignorance—the latter being presented as a thick-headed yokel. All parts, we observe; less and less embodied ideas striving for the possession of the soul of man, more and more real persons exhibiting one or other aspect of the human comedy.

Indeed, the names of these parts speak for themselves, and shew clearly enough what is happening. New muscles of the mind, as it were, are being discovered and exercised. It is becoming a matter of concern to Humanum Genus, not that he is naked, but that he is swaddled; not that he is helpless, but that he is strong. He is not after all a mere bone of contention between the powers of light and darkness: in that centre of the stage that he once so humbly occupied he begins to see himself as a self-sufficing, even a most interesting, protagonist. Nothing perhaps fortifies him more in this notion of himself than the astronomy of the day; and in this matter also the Interlude offered him helpful instruction. From *The Nature of the Four Elements* he might learn that the earth was not a flat disc as his ignorant forefathers supposed; Reason establishes it as a sphere some twenty-one thousand miles in circumference (not so far out, this); it is poised in space without support, because if it rested on a pedestal the sun and moon could not pass beneath it and come up on the other side. This earth, of which he is potentially the master, subject only to the will of Providence and sundry minor interferences from the supernatural, is the one fixed object, as it is the largest and most important, in a universe that revolves in respectful attendance about it. It is his for the winning, and Science will shew him how; we seem to hear a gay and confident trumpet-call as the march of science begins.

The development continues in its various manifestations down to the end of the Tudors. *The Trial of Treasure*, printed in 1567, displays classical as well as scriptural learning. Ulpian Fulwel's *Like Will to Like, Quoth the Devil to the Collier* (1568) presents human beings whose surnames alone belong

to the drama of abstractions Tom Tossplot, Cuthbert Cutpurse, Hankin Hangman, Nichol Newfangle as Vice—we are well on the way to Slender and Froth, to the embodied humours of Ben Jonson, to Fainall, Sir John Brute and Lady Sneerwell. *The Marriage of Wit and Science* (1568), divided into acts and scenes, is a maturer handling of Redford's theme. *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom* (c. 1569) brings in vagabond soldiers from the Netherlands who might rub shoulders with Bardolph, Nym and Pistol. Yet so long did the old form persist that a *Contention between Liberality and Prodigality* was played before the Queen in 1600, when Shakespeare had already brought Falstaff into the world.

Unhappily, the serious Interlude did not confine itself to edification and popular enlightenment. Still too young to know exactly what it was after, it was "nobbled", as the politicians say, by forces that knew better than it did itself how useful it might be. In other words, the Interlude most regrettably became the hireling of propagandists, mundane and ecclesiastical. In the *Magnificence* (c. 1516) of the prolific John Skelton, "poet laureate" (it was not a royal appointment) of Oxford University, there are hints of party animus in the portrayal of Crafty-conveyance and Cloke-collusion, who bring Magnificence face to face with Adversity and Despair. The trend of Wever's *Lusty Juventus* (c. 1550) is not political but hotly Protestant: Youth is swayed from the precepts of Good Counsel by Hypocrisy, who excites him with a parade of Romish paraphernalia and seduces him through the harlot Abominable Living; the play ends with an exposition of Lutheran doctrine, but the one thing worth preserving in it is a fresh and charming little lyric which the writer (with his venal tongue in his cheek, we hope) assigns to the tempters of Juventus.³ The strongly Catholic *Interlude of Youth* (c. 1555, when Mary was on the throne) counters with Charity and Humility *versus* Pride, Riot and Lechery, harking back to the mode of *Hicke-Scorner*—but a poet was at work here. In Scotland we have on the one hand the lost *Haliblude* (1445), as to which Ward acidly surmises that it was calculated to provoke the Scottish Reformation, and on the other Sir David Lyndsay's vigorous and lively *Satire of the Three Estates* (1540), in which the Estates are called up for judgment before Humanitas Rex, and which ends with a distribution of fools' heads to the deserving.⁴

But there were other and worse strayings from the highroad of edification, which is not wholly incompatible with art, into

the by-ways of partisanship. Here are some titles, eloquent of disreputable mating, that the theatre would gladly strike from its pedigree. The pugnacious John Bale (1495-1563), sometime Bishop of Ossory, was a worthy man, no doubt, and a bonny fighter—but what truck had he with the stage? His plays denote how little: *The Treacheries of the Papists*, *The Impostures of Thomas Becket*, *Divine Laws Corrupted by Sodomites*, *Pharisees and Papists* (c. 1536-38). His *King Johan* (c. 1538) hotly rebuts Romish calumnies of that Pope-defying but not otherwise estimable monarch. It is valueless either as literature or history; Bale is as oblivious of Magna Carta as Shakespeare himself, who owes *King Johan* nothing; the play is chiefly interesting as a forerunner of the Chronicle Drama, of which more will be said in the proper place. Edward VI, from whom Bale received his bishopric, put his name to a *Whore of Babylon* (1548). The one really savage riposte from the Roman Church—perhaps because Protestantism was a less gaily coloured target for satire than itself—was *Respublica* (c. 1553), in which the newly crowned Queen Mary figures as Nemesis. On the other side again we have *New Custom* (1573), ferocious and smug but readable, and Nathaniel Wood's blindly, perhaps vengefully, intolerant *Conflict of Conscience* (1581). Among secular works there is notably *The Sackful of News* (1557), which is believed to have been banned by the Privy Council. *Albion Knight* (c. 1565) seems to have been a well-meaning and courageous attempt in a time of intrigue and uncertainty to abate ill-will all around, both between spiritual and temporal factions. But whether their purpose was polemic or pacific, for the regime or against it, all these enacted pamphlets were so many sins against dramatic art, and not until long years after our theatre was old enough to know better did it cease to deal in them. In defence it may be remembered that those we are now considering appeared in a time of much enthusiastic hanging and burning. Moreover, retribution was to come; within not many years the stage was to find the weapons with which it had soiled its hands directed against itself.

From such stuff it is pleasant to turn to certain Interludes that are unmistakably in revolt from the heaviness and didacticism of the Moral stage, being in each instance chiefly concerned with the interplay of minds and the quirks of character. They are: Medwall's *Nature and Fulgens and Lucrece*, Rastell's *Four Elements*, *Gentleness and Nobility* and *Calisto and Melibaea*, and in particular Heywood's *Witty and Witless*,

*The Play of Love, The Play of the Weather, The Four P's, John the Husband, Tyb the Wife and Sir John the Priest and The Pardoner and the Friar, The Curate and Neighbour Pratt.*⁵ All these are dated between 1495 and 1533, and have been traced to a circle in which Sir Thomas More was the central figure. Medwall was sometime chaplain in the household of Cardinal Morton, in which More grew up. Rastell, a typical merchant-venturer of the sixteenth century who found time to be a printer and a dramatist to boot, married More's sister Elizabeth. Heywood, educated at the Chapel Royal and at Oxford, at one time singing-man to Henry VII and of a promise that the age did not allow him to fulfill, married Rastell's daughter Joan. More in his youth had distinguished himself in private theatricals. Rastell, although he seems to have preferred that plays should have a purpose, was play-minded enough to erect a stage in his garden at Finsbury.

The Four Elements has been noted already. Of Medwall's other efforts *Nature* is perhaps in a vein too conventional to warrant its inclusion in the list. But *Fulgens and Lucrece* poses a problem instead of taking sides and dogmatising; the problem is what constitutes true nobility, and there is an element of drama in the solution, for when Lucrece gives her hand to the nobler of her suitors it is she, not the author, who seems to decide. In Rastell's *Gentleness and Nobility* a ploughman and a knight debate another perennial question: what is a gentleman? The discussion, eked out "with divers toys and jests", ends in favour of the ploughman. *Calisto and Melibaea* is remarkable. It is a fragment adopted from a full-length Spanish play, a first act, so to speak, of surprising power. Rastell, intent on a moral and no more, exasperatingly throws his hand in at the moment when the action promises to become exciting. But he gives us no abstractions; Calisto foreshadows the passion-ridden creatures of Webster and Tourneur; the pursued Melibaea has a touch of Imogen's trustfulness and Isabella's indignation; one of Shakespeare's noble women, we might almost say, in embryo. As for the bawd Celestina, grim but racy, a great part was lost to the theatre by Rastell's disinclination to see the thing through. And all these three persons, in some indescribable way, are faintly gilded by the sunlight of Renaissance Italy.

Whoever first applied the epithet sparkling to John Heywood at his best was right; nor is the sparkle of a kind relished by scholars only. In a later century, when nobody cared what a librettist believed, he could undoubtedly have kept his pot boiling with Madame Vestris at the Olympic or with Hollings-

head at the Gaiety. It is true that *Witty and Witless* is no more than a dialogue, and *The Play of Love*, also in the main a disputation, tedious and involved. But *The Play of the Weather*, in which Jupiter is embarrassed by eight conflicting prayers from eight sections of humanity, each demanding simultaneously with the rest of the weather most to its liking, is original and amusing. Still more amusing are the other three. *John the Husband*, *Tyb the Wife* is a tale of hen-pecking, as lively as any Shrovetide play of Hans Sachs, and as neatly handled. In *The Pardoner and the Friar* those two afflictions of the community shout each other down in their respective pulpits like rival hot-gospellers at the Marble Arch, and much more funnily, until the lawful incumbent of the church appears and after a scrimmage puts them to flight. In these two farces, as near to comic drama (even remembering the *Shepherd's Play*) as our theatre had yet come, some have detected the hand of More himself. The earlier *Four P's* is a taproom contest for precedence between a Palmer, a Pardoner, a 'Potecary and a Pedlar. Would anyone be surprised if he came across these lines in *The Ingoldsby Legends*—or rather would he not be surprised to learn that they were written by a Catholic gentleman who suffered exile for his faith two hundred and seventy-nine years before the *Legends* appeared in print? It should be explained that the Pardoner is making a display of his bogus Relics.

PARDONER	Nay sirs, behold: here ye may see The Great Toe of the Trinity. . . .
'POTECARY	I pray you turn that relic about; Either the Trinity had the gout Or else, because it is three toes in one, God made it as much as three toes alone. . . .
PEDLAR	Sir, methinketh your devotion is but small.
PARDONER	Small? methinketh he hath none at all.
'POTECARY	What the devil care I what you think? Shall I praise Relics when they stink?

Apart from the subject-matter, which in an age of unbelief no one would dare speak of irreverently, the lilt of "Either the Trinity had the gout" is as much *Bab Ballads* as *Ingoldsby*. We are half a century yet from the polished-outrageous exchanges of Shakespeare's merry gentlemen. The torrent of rich new words is lacking, and the Italianate parade of cloak and sword. But the fluency is there, the gusto is there; the way is becoming clear. The purpose of Heywood's ribaldry

was still to edify; the drama of edification was still to serve for a little the theatre's mysterious progress. But it shows to-day as a diverging and dwindling track, grass-grown and leading nowhere.

In taking leave of the Moral Play we ought to think of it at its best; and few will dispute that the outstanding best is *Everyman*. Its origin is obscure. Of the first known printings only portions are extant. They are of the early sixteenth century, but it is believed that the play was written toward the end of the fifteenth, by whom, no one knows. Some authorities trace it from the Dutch *Elkerlijck*, which has been ascribed to Petrus Dorlandus of Diest; it is also held that *Elkerlijck* derives from *Everyman*, or both from an older play. Its bias is Catholic, yet it equally chills, and steadies, the hearts of Anglicans, Nonconformists and Agnostics. In the tale of the Morality it comes late, but not too late; it is the rich autumnal harvest of the whole field.

The notion of Death ever present, in the market-place, on the justice's bench, in the merchant's counting-house, at the feast, in the monk's cell and in my lady's chamber, tapping on his spectral tabor, grinning and plucking Man by the sleeve, had a powerful hold on the imagination of the time; nor—for the finer—on the imagination only, for there was in it a grave irony pleasing to the mind. Hans Holbein embodied it in a series of forty drawings to which he gave the name *Totentanz*; with Hamlet's "let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come" it lived on into an age adult enough to savour Melancholy. In *Everyman* this same Death appears upon the stage, and he does not grin.

The story is too well known to need more than a summary here. God, moved to anger by *Everyman*'s blind preoccupation with the material world, sends Death to call him to his account. Served with the summons, *Everyman* protests that he would like a little notice. On learning his visitor's name he is alarmed, and offers a bribe; but Death is incorruptible. He pleads for time, but no: it is to be now. Desperate, he entreats his Fellowship and Kindred to go with him; they have other affairs on hand. He turns to Goods, his worldly wealth, and is laughed at. Nothing is left him but to appeal to his Good Deeds, sin-bound and almost too enfeebled to speak, until his contrition sets her free. But she does not fail; she summons her sister Knowledge, who leads him to Confession. In bitter remorse he scourges the sin out of his flesh, and Good Deeds springs joyfully to life. Still in the prime of manhood,

with Strength, Beauty, Discretion and his Five Senses, he moves toward the tomb. As it gapes for him, Beauty takes to her heels and Strength and Discretion follow, even his Senses steal away; at the last, Knowledge must leave him too. But Good Deeds is true to the end, and with her hand fast in his he goes to his account, shriven and unafraid.

I pray you all give your audience,
And hear this matter with reverence,
By figure a moral play—
The *Summoning of Everyman* called it is,
That of our lives and ending shows
How transitory we be all day.
This matter is wondrous precious,
But the intent of it is more gracious,
And sweet to bear away . . .

But to quote from *Everyman* is to do it an injury; it should be read in full or, better, seen. There are lines of such beauty and simple purpose that they dwell in the memory; but the play has a fierce disdain of verbal gawds. The beauty is of the spirit, and is passionately sustained; to what effect may be seen by a comparison with the version that Von Hoffmannsthal prepared for Max Reinhardt. This, as the genius of Reinhardt staged it in the cathedral square at Salzburg, was *kolossal*, a pageant of medievalism, lusty and warm with life, as diffuse as a Breughels landscape. One masterstroke was the voice of God calling to Jedermann from the hill above the town; but no less a masterstroke, in its way, was the whispering of an impropriety from one end of Jedermann's dinner-table to the other. We had Jedermann's mistress, his steward, his cook, his poor neighbour, his debtor, his old mother on her way to early service, a lantern borne before her (this was tenderly done), and at the last a superb authentic Devil fussing and yammering when his prey escaped him. Not thus was it when William Poel, to whom the original's gaunt economy was congenial, revived *Everyman* here, long before. Defying theatrical usage, which strives to keep a theatre "warm", he established at once the chill of the outer darkness and maintained it to the end. The effects he invited you to remember were the cry of Good Deeds: I thank God, now I can leap and run, when the scourge fell on Everyman's shoulders and by that act of penitence loosed her bonds, or the hideous humped figure of Death as he hoisted the lid of the tomb. At Salzburg you cried your eyes out; but *Everyman* hurt behind the eyes.

There is such a gulf between the august and coldly limned figures of this play and Rastell's Italianate bawd or the lively English phrase-turners of Heywood that we may wonder it was ever spanned, that a drama so diverse could ever be brought to a kind of unity. Yet it was to be so spanned, and by a grasp that held all the stuff of life between. Nor, in an age that loved life, was the eternal admonition of *Everyman* forgotten. A very raddled Aspasia with a torn ruff was to put it in her own way

Thou little whoreson tidy Bartholemew boar-pig, when wilt thou give up feasting o' days and foining o' nights, and begin to patch up thine old body for heaven?

PART TWO

From the Tudors to the Commonwealth

Chapter 1

Renaissance and Reformation

GREEK CLARITY OF mind and Christian charity of heart, those twin bastions of the West, have for so long informed our ways of thinking and living that we can hardly picture one without the other. Yet the new Europe that arose on the ruins of the old inherited the second of these ancient wisdoms before it made any wide acquaintance with the first. Medieval man started life, as it were, by learning his prayers at his mother's knee. And for so long as leading-strings were necessary the Church was a good mother, inculcating gentleness and courtesy, and often, in virtue of an authority that was absolute throughout her dominions, protecting the weak against the strong. The revolt, when it came, was as a revolt of adolescence, ever more powerfully upheld as the mists dissolved and there loomed behind them the still potent standards of a world that had been old when the Church was born. To those who lived through it, the Renaissance came as the liberation of the mind. The Reformation, its destined offspring, sought to confer an equal freedom on the spirit.

The Renaissance was a process, not an event. Pedagogues seeking to hammer a date into the infant skull used to evince a firm preference for 1453, which is easy to memorise because there are fourteen letters in Constantinople, five in Turks and three in Get. This labour-saving device brought some confusion in its train. It encouraged us to think of the fall of Constantinople as an explosion which, by blowing the garnered learning of antiquity to the ends of Europe, made it once and for all accessible to mankind. Before its echoes had died down, we supposed, Luther had thrown his inkpot at the Devil; the Armada had succumbed to the indolent strategy of Drake; our own forefathers had ensured the golden opinion of posterity by their insistence on spacious living, whatever that might be, and Shakespeare, with the foresight one would expect of him, had decided that now or never was the time to be writing plays. The child mind likes telescoping; we were satisfied that all these happenings were the immediate outcome of a Renaissance which had, so to speak, "gone up" in 1453.

Not all of that vast heritage did in fact reach the ends of

Europe, for it is believed that in the looting of the city some hundred and twenty thousand manuscripts were irretrievably lost. Nor was Byzantium the only storehouse of such treasure; a great deal was in safe keeping in Italy. The real significance of 1453 is that the Turkish conquest impelled a great dispersal of scholars, who carried their scholarship with them; and in this manner it certainly accelerated a revival of learning which had long been under way. If we must have a date, there are some pregnant words of Gibbon which points us to a better one: "the mechanics of a German town had invented an art which derides the havoc of time and barbarism"¹; 1440 was the year of the printing-press.

In neither of these two great transformations, then, was there an unheralded radiance, as of a sunrise in the tropics, or any precise point of time on which to seize as marking the dawn of humanism, of scientific enquiry, of rebellion within the Church. In England alone the Papal supremacy had been challenged by King John and the validity of the apostolic succession by Wycliffe. Long after Roger Bacon's time it was matter for careful debate (very strange debate to us) how many angels could be accommodated on a needle's point; but when that insatiable speculator died in 1294 he left behind him a passable guess at the mechanical transport of the future, by land, sea and air. As for humanism, Geoffrey Chaucer did not wait for 1453, or even for 1440. Anticipating to an astonishing degree the vast embrace of Shakespeare, he presented the figures of classic myth, of classic history, of Italian fiction, through the tales that he set his cavalcade of English types to tell. Yet Chaucer died a hundred and seventy-nine years before the appearance of North's translation of Plutarch.²

Over an England thus prepared the full flood of the Renaissance swept with more abruptness than elsewhere, because in the beginning it had been retarded. Caxton's press was at work in Westminster some twenty-five years after Gutenberg's at Mainz.³ But the second half of the fifteenth century was, for us, disturbed by the Wars of the Roses; and to them succeeded quickly the power politics of the Tudors and an era of bitter religious strife. The Anglicanism of Henry VIII stemmed from no theological argument, but from the monarch's resolve to be head of the Church within his own territory; he was equally at liberty, as Macaulay observed, to execute a Protestant as a heretic and a Papist as a traitor. But in the sombre conflicts that followed, with hangings and burnings now on one side, now on the other, the dominant issue was the Reformation. In short, these two great forces, respec-

tively of Latin and of Nordic origin, were playing upon us at one and the same time, confusingly for the historian but not without ultimate benefit to the nation's poise. In the event it was Italy that captured our imaginations: the Italianate Englishman, *diavolo incarnato*, was to become a byword; but it was the German-derived Protestantism of Geneva that shaped our orthodoxy.

When the young Queen ascended the throne in 1558 the chief hope of a weary people lay in peace and security within the confines of the realm, in such retrenchment as was compatible with the dreaded and growing power of Spain, and in an Established Church which, at whatever cost of compromise, would roughly define where we stood in matters of belief and observance. It says much for the shrewdness of Elizabeth and her advisers that all three blessings were conferred and maintained. Between troubled times past and to come there was a lull, tranquil enough to favour a flowering of the spirit, too precarious for any weakening of the sinews. Old hatreds began to die, and the fumes of Smithfield to yield to a more translucent air. The breathing-space became an age of splendour, personified for the men of that time by the Queen's Majesty; for us by an admirably balanced Englishman whose clear mind and charitable heart made music together.

Chapter 2

Elizabeth and her London

THE ERA OPENED glumly, with England disjoint and impoverished, and at the beck of Spain. Before it closed, a united England was thriving as never before, and the Spanish power was broken. From the destruction of the Armada onward, the Queen became in the eyes of her subjects the symbol of themselves and of the age; the adulatory addresses of the poets are no mere lip service. It was a material, a secular age; what remained of ecclesiastical strife was turned over to the churchmen, among whom all but the least reconcilable might still cry "God Save the Queen"; the laity rejoiced more and more in this world rather than in the next. It was an age avid to know, possess and handle. Scholars and translators ransacked the treasure-houses of antiquity and the printing-presses clanked and thumped. But explorer-pirates, uniting with merchant-venturers, brought more ponderable wealth from beyond the seas; and as trade grew a new rich class uprose, prospered, and lived to the limit of its prosperity. Great symmetrically planned houses sprang up for the new rich, for the newly ennobled, replacing the ruined homes of an aristocracy reduced by civil war. Italian architects, ingeniously blending the imported Palladian with the native Gothic, brought us the *piano nobile*, long galleries with floors as firm as ferro-concrete and much more soundproof, great windows devised to catch the paler English sun. Yet already old-timers were deploring modern ways, the decline of patriarchal solicitude and hospitality, the absentee landlord, the tenant who left the land. For to rich and poor alike the compelling magnet was London, a glowing, teeming metropolis of two hundred thousand souls, already extending beyond the city walls to Westminster and the docks, to Newington Butts and the Oxford Road, and still growing, despite the ban on further building. It's highway was the river; there were some forty thousand watermen who for a consideration would ferry you eastward-ho, or westward-ho, or across to the joys of Bankside. Along the London shore there extended a chain of palaces. Some were royal; of the rest one or other might yet bear the royal arms, if certain heady dreams came true. The royal chain stretched from

Windsor and Hampton (which Elizabeth found unfriendly to her rheumatism) down to Greenwich, on the Kentish side.

The Queen of whom this London was, on terms, the loyal citadel was a hard, bright jewel with many facets. As a young woman, virginal, scared and blunt, she may well have been a charmer, for all that hooky nose and imperious Tudor chin. As an old woman, still virginal and blunt but past all scaring, who shall say she did not maintain that charm, perfunctorily perhaps by daubing her poor face, but in joyful fact by her unquenchable vitality and forthrightness? For it would seem that this born ruler, from the moment when she felt a sovereign's dais beneath her feet and held the skein of statecraft in her hands, steadfastly refused to be anything other than her absolute, positive self, storming, guffawing, swearing and spitting as impulse or policy swayed her. These acerbities were softened, or enhanced, by many of the accomplishments that were appropriate in young ladies of the time. She loved music and painting, and unquestionably had more than a patron's understanding of those arts. She could speak seven languages gracefully; forcefully on occasion. She was a great dancer, and used this gift without scruple in her tortuous and dilatory diplomacy. For when, at a party, an ambassador sought to surprise her guard, she would bewilder and baffle him just by going on dancing; alternatively she could weary him, by standing for hours as motionless as a carved and gilded image of Majesty.

The Elizabethan Englishman who was sedulous of fashion and the Court embodied opposites no less striking. Emphatically he had hair on his chest, as the saying goes. But as he made his way about the agglomeration of mansions, gardens, warehouses and congested hovels that was his city he flaunted his masculine plumage as proudly as a peacock. He wore rosettes on the shoes in which he strode along a street that was also a midden. His corsetted waist, his bombasted breeches; the starched proliferation of his ruff, hateful to the godly; his warlike beard and carefully disposed love-lock; his malely assertive codpiece and too-ready sword and his single pendant earring: such adornments as these were costly, yet to keep abreast of a dizzily changing mode he would cheerfully fell his timber or pawn his land. His appetite for life was Rabelaisian. Brain and brawn thrived together; Greek, the mathematics and a neat touch in the contriving and setting of a sonnet joined with swordsmanship and the sports of the field in the furnishing of a complete man. He could pass without any sense of incongruity from a consort of viols to an exchange at arms;

from the bookstalls in St. Paul's churchyard to the harlot-infested aisle of the cathedral or to the bear-pits across the river; from sublime mimic passion at the Swan or Globe to a real disembowelling at Tyburn. Or on London Bridge there might be a new head to see, which had been removed in accordance with the statelier usage of the Tower after a farewell address of sound morality and impeccable phrasing; but London Bridge was a great place for silks and haberdashery too. The lesser people aped their betters, vying with each other in the purchase of cheaper finery that was equally beyond their means. They were devils in public brawl, particularly when the cry of *Clubs!* sounded and the incorrigible 'prentices were out. Unlettered and untravelled, they fingered with wonder a new currency of words, and sniffed the spices of the Orient when ships unloaded at the quays. They swarmed to gaze at a stuffed monster from Bermuda as they swarmed to see a bawd whipped through the town behind a cart. They were as greedy for thrilling verse in the playhouse as for the patter of the mountebank and the rhymes of the ballad-monger, who in virtue of his power to hold an audience was often an accomplice of the cutpurse. They had an ear. A "noise" of music, as they misleadingly called it, was always at command. At the barber's there was usually a cittern on which one could strum while awaiting one's turn. It is on record that the watermen, a foul-mouthed lot, sang snatches from *Hero and Leander* to their own tune as they rowed.

Behind this gay and tumultuous pageant lurked the Plague and the maladies of the brothel. Above it, beating down upon it, was the effulgence of Gloriana on her throne. For the questing men who hung about her in their finery there were also a war-cloud above the Netherlands and a haze over the uncharted seas, both promising a chancy eminence when court life palled or the royal favour veered. And as backbone of the social structure there was that growing middle class whose domain extended eastward of Temple Bar, hardworking, acquisitive, godfearing and excusably more than a little self-righteous. They deplored the extravagance of the ruff; they deprecated, respectfully, their Queen's addiction to the play. We shall hear more of them as this narrative proceeds.

These sharp contrasts must be kept in mind if we are to understand the theatre which the age produced. We shall be reminded of them constantly, even in the gentle and disciplined Shakespeare. We must not be shocked to learn that Benedick, a companion of princes, is averse to washing his face; that is a trifle. For we also have to learn, for instance,

that in *Romeo and Juliet* to overprune the pleasantries of Mercutio and the Nurse is to rob the play of something that positively helps its presentation of young love. Any tempering of any harshness may weaken the whole; it is only on a sunless day that there are no shadows. The Elizabethans exulted in a fierce sun, and in shadows as black as Tartarus. Their balancing of opposites connoted a fundamental balance in themselves. The individual lived dangerously amid a general security which reflected the unchanging order of the universe. Of that universe the "sure and firm-set earth" was the centre and man the central figure.¹ Copernicus, dying in 1543, had left behind him an alternative hypothesis that a few learned enquirers were debating and Galileo was to suffer for confirming; for plain men the comfortable Ptolemaic system still held, as it had held for John Rastell. The firmament enveloping our world comprised an infinitude of concentric orbits, along which the heavenly bodies melodiously took their way:

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls,
But while this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close us in, we cannot hear it.

Here was not only a most pleasing illustration of the divine harmony; for Shakespeare's contemporaries it posed a model for all harmony on earth. Beyond the uttermost orbit of this system Chaos reigned; but that word had also a particular significance for any who recalled the civil wars. The bulwark against chaos in this world was an unalterable scale of degrees, radiating from the Crown. The belief in an order of this kind is deeply rooted in Shakespeare²; it was strong in every thinking man of his day, even in the dissipated Greene and the supposedly godless Marlowe, and was thankfully cherished by the common people. The universe itself was full of minor terrors: stellar influences, eclipses, comets, elementals, ghosts, witches, fairies—only these last, "spirits of another sort", being held at the worst mischievous rather than malevolent; and the purpose of one and all was to alarm and perplex mankind. But in the governable world there was degree, and the rule of law. The seas were perilous but the haven was safe. The Elizabethan found himself poised between adventure and security, and for his security he had the Crown to thank.

In search of a comparison we often turn, rather wistfully in

these times, to the heyday of our expansion under another great queen. But there is a difference. The England of the Great Exhibition also knew itself to be adventurous and believed itself secure. But that was an industrial England; we may fancy we hear the beat of the all-conquering machine in Macaulay's prose. The springtime buoyancy was lacking, and the gift of wonder. To see with the eyes of a child and apprehend with the faculties of a man was an exhilaration not to be experienced twice. The Elizabethan age was an age of discovery, in which every Tom, Dick and Harry could feel he had a share. But the greatest discovery of all was of the boundless range of the human mind and spirit, and of the marvels that lay within the compass of their most potent instrument, the word. We can hardly conceive how it felt to learn, within so short a space of time, what English words could be made to do. We bathed in words, and splashed each other with them, like children on their first morning at the seaside. Words became an intoxicant, as liberating to the fantasy as any draught from the Mermaid's tap. They blew in a great gale, and carried Ben Jonson before them like a merchantman trampling the seas under her forefoot; certain frailer vessels found the blast too strong, and they yawed, and were taken aback, and got lost in the smother; even the young Shakespeare was diverted from his course by a fondness for wordy conceits. And in this discovery too the plain man could share, if he had a penny to spend; for it was in the words the players spoke that the English Renaissance found its culminating expression.

Chapter 3

Toward the Globe

SO FAR WE have seen the Morality deriving from the Miracle and the Interlude from the Morality; the replacing of sacred characters by abstractions and the centering of the action in Man, and in turn the replacing of abstractions by types of humanity tending more and more to become interacting human characters: a continuing development in short towards a secular drama. It is a main line of descent, and we have followed it for the sake of clearness. But although it brings us right down into the era of the first Elizabeth, it can hardly be said to carry us as far as Shakespeare's Globe. For that consummation an alliance with foreign stock was needed; and we have yet to consider what other native stuff, theatrical or near-theatrical, awaited its coming.

First we should glance at the Folk Drama. It is a name of rather cheerless, not to say hackle-raising, associations to stage people to-day, but at least was not invented by the humble performers themselves. The thing, like the name, was a hybrid, yielding no direct progeny. It sprang from the immemorial urge to "dress up"—in particular on occasions of significance in the countryman's calendar—and, being dressed up, to *do* something, parade, sing, dance or even act, either in propitiation of the gods of fertility or for fun, applause, beer, money in the hat, or for all or any of these things at once. Only a summary is possible here, and the reader is referred once more to Sir Edmund Chambers. But it may be traced through the May Game, which introduces us to Robin of the Wood and his later and French-imported consort, Maid Marion, to *Sumer Is Icumen In*; to those very ancient song-dances *Oranges and Lemons* and *Here We Come Gathering Knots In May*—a knot is a posy, and *Nuts* an absurd corruption; to the dim ancestry, perhaps, of *Sir Roger de Coverley*. It was present in the Sword Dance, which symbolised the conflict of Winter and Spring, and in the Morris dances, which sublimated encounters of a fleshier kind. It is embodied in the show of the Nine Worthies in *Love's Labour's Lost*. It comes its nearest to true theatre in the plays of the Mummers: the word is supposed to derive from the Low German *momme*,

a mask. Old people may yet remember the Mummers trooping from house to house, like the Waits, and the spiced ale and cakes in the kitchen after the performance. A text exists of *St. George and the Dragon*, as it was still played at Lutterworth in 1863.¹ If motive is an essential in drama, it must be confessed that the Lutterworth *St. George* is not a very powerful work. In comes I, says Beelzebub (we suspect it was Oi), And in my hand a frying-pan; Pleased to get all the money I can. The Clown, who follows, has even less substantial grounds for his appearance: In come I, who's never been yet. And the King of England, the Turkish Champion, Captain Slasher, even *St. George* himself, are seldom, if ever, dramatically impelled. Such Folk Drama was hardly, as we understand the word, drama at all. On the other hand it certainly called for impersonation. In the opportunities that it afforded the individual player to abound and blossom in the character he had magically assumed by dressing up, it was a great encourager of acting; and it is likely that when, in obedience to the York ordinance of 1476, the discreet enquirers searched the city for talent for the Miracles, they combed the outlying villages for good Mummers.

The Folk Drama had its counterpart on higher social planes. The quasi-military pageant of the joust has no place here. But civil pageantry was a part of the nation's life, whether it took the form of a "riding", as on *St. George's Day*, of the Saint in procession with his captive Dragon behind him, or of the towers and temples, swarming with allegorical figures and flowing with wine, with which the citizens of London welcomed a succession of sovereigns from Henry III and Elinor of Provence to Queen Elizabeth. (Indeed it lives on to this day, in the Lord Mayor's Show, and in the grubby train of Guy Fawkes.) In high places, at the Palace, the Universities and the Inns of Court, the Christmas merrymaking of Saxon England had been organised and enlarged out of recognition. The Lord of Misrule presided (in Scotland the Abbot of Unreason), with his paraphernalia of masks and hobby-horses and his retinue of mock-councillors, mock-courtiers, jugglers, acrobats and zanies. Of the Mummings a royal elaboration was the court's Disguising; what is the incursion of Henry and his twelve shepherds at Wolsey's supper-party but an incursion of mummers on a royal scale? Moreover, these Disguisings joined with the court interlude to produce the Masque. Both together were united with outdoor pageantry in the entertainments that were offered to Elizabeth when she made her prog-

ress to great country houses: as at Elvetham, where Lord Hertford decreed an artificial lake, crescent-shaped in implicit homage to a virgin queen, with fantastical island, Tritons whose wetness did not abate their loyal fervour, and a ship-load of warbling nymphs; or at Kenilworth, where Lord Leicester's *Princely Pleasures* continued intermittently for eighteen days. But here again we have only certain elements of the theatre, not the whole, true thing. The most one can say is that these spectacles afforded abundant opportunities for impersonation, if not precisely for acting, and that as a rule they required the help of the kind of poet who might one day become a playwright.

It was, perhaps, our insatiable thirst for acting that, more than anything else, prepared us for the coming impregnation. If once we could evolve a full-length comedy there would be no dearth of actors greedy for the tremendous experience of sustaining a full-length part. If the guildsmen were the first enthusiasts, they were soon to be replaced, in Protestant times, by the amateurs of the Universities and of the Inns of Court, these latter being closely knit and enterprising confraternities much given to the getting-up of shows. There were the trained, half-professional choirboys of St George's Chapel, Windsor, of the Chapel Royal and of St Paul's. More notably, there was the growing class of strolling Interluders, who positively lived by the practice of their art. We have had to neglect the actor while we followed a line of development in the drama with which he was concerned only, if ever, when his luck was in; it is time to consider him now. But to do so we must go back some centuries.

The minstrel of medieval England was the joint product of the Nordic bard, or *skop*, and of the Latin mime. The one was universally respected as a poet and singer, was richly rewarded, and might be honoured with the confidence of his overlord, even of his king. The other was a nuisance, a scandal and a stumbling-block, anathematised by the Church; yet shameless, adroit, skilled, gay, resilient, unaccountably indispensable and not to be abolished. In the first of these two aspects the minstrel was known to the courts of Alfred and Theodoric alike; in the second, England knew nothing of him, as we have seen, until after the Norman conquest. Thus the medieval English minstrel inherited, on the one side, the gift of lyricism, the sense of possession by the spirit without which no man should handle the arts, and an awareness of his moral claim to be secure. On the other side he inherited the gift of mimicry and the sense of the adventurous road, the bluff begotten of self-

criticism and self-assertion that steels actors to sing for their supper—as every Hamlet should remember when he hears the cracked voice of a poor collateral who is amusing the queue beneath his dressingroom window.

With such diverse blood in him, the medieval minstrel might aspire to become anything from a variety artist of the first rank to an esteemed poet. His accomplishments were so manifold, his protean quality so puzzlingly attractive and repugnant to Churchmen (of whom the jollier, in Aucassin's view, would assuredly fraternise with minstrels in hell), that in the thirteenth century Thomas de Cabham, Sub-dean of Salisbury and later Archbishop of Canterbury, thought it proper to classify minstrels generally, in terms which should allow of no misunderstanding. As tolerable he ranked all of the bardic strain, who sang in celebration of saints and princes. As damnable he ranked all of the mimic strain, the impersonators, the wearers of dreadful masks, the indecent posturers, the singers of bawdy songs. He stigmatised equally all satirists and witty railers, thereby levelling the shafts of his displeasure at unfrocked or vagrant critics of the Church, also anticipating the distaste which some staid Elizabethans were to feel for ex-university cribblers who lived by their scurrilous pens.²

Both sheep and goats survived the Sub-dean's segregation. By 1400 minstrelsy could if it chose claim an uncrowned laureate in Chaucer (who was also an eminent civil servant) and, even down to its variety artists, was organised in a close confederacy. The Exchequer Roll of the King's Remembrancer's department for Whitsun 1306 (an outstanding date, when the Black Prince was knighted) reveals the minstrels as an elaborate hierarchy, maintained by the privy purse, holding Norman-French styles and titles that glow like their gaudy raiment.³ Moreover, the minstrels of the king and the nobility were not tied to their respective courts. Between engagements they were free to tour, carrying with them the signed recommendations of their masters. They became a powerful trade union, crushing the free-lance entertainers, on whom the Statute of Labourers bore hardly, as upon vagabonds, vacabonds, bond-free and therefore masterless men. They retained their inherited diversity; they were singers, instrumentalists, jugglers, conjurers professing necromancy, acrobats, impersonators and, as important as any of these, story-tellers. The fifteenth-century minstrel was still the newspaper and circulating library of all but the sparse public that was literate and had the money to buy books. Further afield, the minstrel might be anything he chose to be: in the Welsh marches, perhaps, an

agitator, to be countered by minstrel propagandists of the Crown.

But in 1475 came the printing-press, and there followed the dissemination of printed stories, of ballads, of official news, of pamphlets. Soon, more than one branch of the industry was threatened; and when the relater of tales and other matters saw his occupation failing, his secondary employment as an impersonator began to assume a higher place in the scale of his accomplishments. Music and his sundry juggleries apart, in one vital matter he could still keep his head above water—instead of singing or saying what the printed book had stolen from him, he could *act* it. Accordingly (or so one figures) the minstrel took counsel with his neglected other self, the mime.⁴ He began to turn actor, reassuming in that quality his ancient pride, and ousting the amateur. As actor, he began even to oust himself as minstrel. An authentic minstrel of the old school was retained to amuse Elizabeth at Kenilworth, but there proved to be no occasion for his services; he was cut out of the bill, doubtless to his disgust.

Like the minstrels before them the actors were glad to avail themselves of the protection of a great name. As early as 1482 there is record of the troupes of Richard, Duke of Gloucester and of the Earl of Essex; the names of Northumberland, Oxford, Derby, Shrewsbury and Arundel are to follow soon.⁵ The actors were wise, in their day, to seek such patronage. Even if the money reward was small, they eluded the risk of being rounded up as masterless men if they could describe themselves as the patron's servants. Elizabeth's edict of 1572, proclaiming all players not so patronised rogues and vagabonds, was not a hostile measure but protective and salutary: an inducement to the actor to be good or make way for his betters. From such patronage sprang Lord Leicester's men, the Lord Admiral's men, the Lord Chamberlain's servants, the King's players. It was to confer on James and Richard Burbage a security that would enable them to get the best out of Shakespeare. It was to confer on Shakespeare a security that would enable him to get the best out of Richard Burbage: a conjunction to which we owe much.

The actor, then, was rising in status, and the trend of the time was with him. But the old drama was moribund. It had sounded its top-note in *Everyman* and, with the passing of the age for which it had spoken, it had little more to say. The rekindling touch was to come from Italy.

For the Italian playwright of the Renaissance the models

were Plautus and Terence in comedy and Seneca in tragedy. No later than 1314 the *Ecerinis* of Albertino Mussato, in Latin and in the Senecan manner, was read (not acted) before the assembled university of Padua. Petrarch's *Philologia*, written a few years after and modelled on Terence, ranks as the first Renaissance comedy. In 1427 twelve hitherto unknown plays of Plautus came to light, including the *Menaechmi* and the *Miles Gloriosus*.⁶ It should be emphasised that none of these plays were performed; they were read, or at most declaimed. But in the second half of the fifteenth century eager research unearthed the works of Vitruvius. These not only revealed that the ancient drama was written to be played, but described the ancient theatre, with a wealth of exciting detail. They inspired the inventions of Serlio, whose *Architettura* of 1551 establishes him as the author of modern scenic design.⁷ But the influence of Vitruvius was already sensible in 1486, when the *Menaechmi* was given—acted, that is to say—at Ferrara on a reconstruction of the Roman stage. In 1487 the *Amphitruo* (also by Plautus) followed, with elaborate scenic decoration. Before 1500 classical tragedy and comedy alike had been played by the students of the Academy of Rome; it may be remarked in passing that the settings for comedy are known to have been scenic.⁸

At about this time there appeared in England Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucrece*, deriving indirectly from an Italian tale. Some thirty years later came Rastell's *Calisto and Melibæa*, a translated fragment in which we have already noted an Italianate quality. But some years were yet to pass before Italian influence began to shape our notions of dramatic construction. It was natural that it should come by way of the schools, and that it should first shew itself in comedy, congenial to amateurs who were already familiar with the interlude. Early in the sixteenth century there was published *Terens in English*, a version of the *Andria*⁹, acquainting the reader who had no Latin with the types and technique of Roman comedy. In 1537 appeared the interlude of *Thersites*, a schoolboyish but vigorous and funny presentation of the classic braggart which clearly owes a good deal to the *Miles Gloriosus*. *Jack Juggler*, licensed for printing in 1562 but played earlier, and actually written for schoolboys, is a garbled version of the *Amphitruo*. George Gascoyne's *Supposes*, played at Gray's Inn in 1566, is Ariosto's *I Suppositi* done into English. But as early as 1550 the Italian seed had taken firm root in English soil; for in or about that year there appeared a five-act English comedy in which humorously observed characters, as full-blooded as any

of John Heywood's, were given at last an opportunity to spread themselves within the framework of a skilfully contrived plot.

This comedy was *Ralph Roister Doister*, by Nicholas Udall,¹⁰ born about 1505, from 1534 to 1541 headmaster of Eton (a post which he relinquished under a cloud), and of Westminster for a few years before his death in 1556. Ralph, like Thersites, springs from the *Miles Gloriosus*, and his parasite, Mathew Merrygreek, is a stock type of Plautine comedy. But both are English and alive, and the action is set in homely middle-class surrounding. The braggart's wooing of the Widow Custance, the complications that ensue, the misunderstanding when her lover returns from abroad, and the final exposing (not cruelly) of Ralph, are well drawn and, what is more to our purpose, well built up. There is a touch of schoolmaster in the play, but its art and its humanity predominate. To those who saw it in its own time its construction alone must have suggested entirely new ideas of what a comedy might be. It has been revived once or twice in our day before audiences earnestly resolved to split their sides but not quite able to. The wine has been kept too long and lacks fortifying spirit; it is not sour, but a trifle thin.

There is more enduring stuff, perhaps, in the second full-length English comedy, *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (c. 1553): a farce, properly speaking, but a well-constructed farce. It was produced at Christ's College, Cambridge, and is attributed to William Stevenson, fellow of the same. The central theme of the play is simplicity itself. Grandma Gurton has lost her needle. It is her only needle and, worse, the only needle in the village—not too improbably, for the manufacture of English needles was still in its infancy. One Diccon, a Bedlam-man, a licensed irresponsible and the Iago of the piece, plants a suspicion that Dame Chat has stolen it. Crises follow, one growing out of another with the logic inseparable from good farce, until the whole parish is involved, from the bailiff, the curate and the doctor to the Gammers' cat. In the final scene a sudden howl from Hodge, her odd-man, reveals that throughout the play the needle has been sticking in the seat of his breeches. That is all; but although we may find it rather spun-out to-day, the excitement is never allowed to flag. Here and there the text is unquotably foul, but not meanly so; the invective of the Gammer and the Dame is on the heroic scale:

MRS CHAT Come out, hog!

MRS GURTON Come out, hog! and let me have my right.

MRS CHAT Thou arrant witch!

MRS GURTON Thou bawdy bitch! I'll make thee curse this
 night. . . .

 Thou slut! thou cut! thou rakes! thou jakes! will
 shame not make thee hide thee?

MRS CHAT Thou skald! thou bald! thou rotten! thou glutton!
 I will no longer chide thee;
 But I will teach thee to keep home!

MRS GURTON Wilt thou, drunken beast . . .

Not all university drama was academic in 1556.

The rise of English tragedy is a less simple story.

The Italian comic playwright had taken no harm, and had transmitted none to us, by basing his work on Plautus and Terence, both of whom, writing in the days of the Republic, were skilled and lively transcribers of the lost Menander. But the Italian tragic playwright did himself, and others, incalculable harm by taking as his model the saturnine, Spanish-blooded and rhetorical Seneca, who transmuted more than he transcribed Euripides in terms agreeable to a coterie-public of the days of Nero. To a Europe that was looking to Italy for guidance in the art of writing plays he offered a conception of classic tragedy which was, in fact, his own conception of Seneca's conception. Europe took him much too seriously, France most seriously of all. With two illustrious names before us, it would be rash to estimate how far the French tragic theatre was the worse for the restraint of a dead hand; but such restraint there was, from Jodelle's *Cléopâtre Captive* in 1552 until revolution brought the romantics in its train. Why the same fate did not befall us, we have now to discover.

It might well have done. At the time when *Ralph Roister Doister* made its mark as the first full-length English comedy, English tragedy was still feeling its way, on the popular stage, in a very uncertain fashion. Faced as they were with the Italian example, we cannot blame those scholarly Englishmen who sought to impose on it their own standards of coherence and style. Gloomy and lifeless the Senecan tragedy might be; compared with our riotous native product it was at least orderly; the kind of tragedy a gentleman might deign to write for other gentlemen to see. The temptation to the scholar must have been great. He was beginning to mould a language that was revealing, in the right hands, undreamt-of strength and subtlety of expression. Why not extend the authoritarian hand a little, manipulate a little this mysterious art of the people, that

had done magical things with the bastard English-French of the York cycle; school it, rule it? It should be easy; the theatre was young and malleable; the courtly taste could not fail to applaud him. Confidently, the scholarly Englishman set himself to write tragedies that should reform the drama according to the Senecan prescription. Unaccountably, they did not draw. The populace would have none of them; the taste of the Court, while friendly, was lamentably indiscriminating. The English drama, an unthankful child, came to his party, ate all the buns, was nourished more than it knew, and went away.

Seneca His Tenne Tragedies appeared in 1581, but this collection had been translated piecemeal from 1559 onwards, and the works had long been studied in the Latin.¹¹ Our first full-scale effort in the Senecan vein was *Ferrex and Porrex* (1562), otherwise known as *Gorboduc*, which was the title in the unauthorised edition of 1565. In order to arrive at some notion of English tragedy as the reformers found it and as they hoped to leave it, it may be instructive to compare *Ferrex and Porrex* with *King Cambyzes* (c. 1561) and *Appius and Virginus* (c. 1564). The three plays appear within three years, but the contrast between monumental masonry and ebullient life is striking.

Like the less noteworthy *King Darius* of approximately the same date, *The Tragical Comedy of Appius and Virginia* and *The Lamentable Tragedy Mixed Full of Pleasant Mirth Containing the Life of Cambyzes King of Persia* have a link with the Moralities; for the abstractions and the Vice still play their parts; and the stage direction *Here let Virginus go about the scaffold* takes us back to the raging excursions of Herod. Both titles remind us a little of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, and the resemblance does not end there. The theme of *Appius and Virginia*—a maiden who prefers death at her father's hand to dishonour—was in time to appeal to Lessing, to Sheridan Knowles and to Macaulay. Here, as by Macaulay, it is treated in a thumping ballad metre that at least gives it drive and heart. The comic relief is reinforced by four lyrical numbers, and is linked with the main action by Haphazard the Vice, who acts as tempter to Appius against the prompting of Conscience, and who eventually proves human being enough to be hanged. Of Appius we are informed, in Greek messenger fashion, that

As soon as he in prison was enclosed out of sight
He desperate for bloody deed did sle himself outright. . . .

but as the climax of the play *Virginius*, in the true manner of the early Elizabethans, decapitates his daughter on the stage:

VIRGINIA Yet stay awhile, O father dear, for flesh to death is frail

Let first my wimple bind mine eyes and then thy blow assail. . . .

Now, father, work thy will on me, that life (*sic*) I may enjoy!

VIRGINIUS Now stretch thy hand, *Virginius*, that loth would flesh destroy!

The marginal stage direction says: *Here tie a handkercher about her eyes, and then strike off her head*. We have to admit that Macaulay handled this better—so might Webster have done. Who the author was we do not know; he calls himself “R.B.”, and may have been Richard Bower, sometime master of the Chapel children. We must picture a man of imperfect scholarship, for he takes Appius and Claudius to be two distinct persons. For all that, he shows a crude knack of rhyme and some feeling for theatrical effect: it is penny gaff drama, but even a penny gaff can be moving.

Sir John Falstaff, having promised us a speech in King Cambyses’ vein, does not in fact keep his promise.¹² The vein of King Cambyses, in the play of that name by Thomas Preston, later Master of Trinity Hall, Cambridge, is, like the metre, partly that of *Appius and Virginia*, and is partly feeling its way to higher things; for this is a maturer work. Cambyses’ unjust deputy faintly foreshadows Shakespeare’s Angelo; his suffering people are embodied in the near-abstraction Commons’ Complaint; he himself is a quarter-way house on the road from Herod to Tamburlaine, displaying the exuberance in good and evil that was, for a long time to come, required of eastern potentates on the western stage. In truth, both these plays are in their rude way sound theatre. Their psychology is erratic and their action patchy; they are of a school that incurred deservedly the censure of Sir Philip Sidney. But there are good lines in them; they have a healthier smell of the box-office than the polite *Gorboduc*; and they were understandably more popular, since they afforded good parts to tear a cat in. The Globe in its glory a generation later would have pronounced them, as we should say, intolerably Ham. Yet the Globe was to owe them something.

Gorboduc—or *Ferrex and Porrex*—was the joint work of Thomas Norton, a Calvinist barrister, and Thomas Sackville,

later Lord Buckhurst. It was produced before Elizabeth by the gentlemen of the Inner Temple on January 18, 1562. Although the cause for which it stood was in the event lost, in twenty-eight years it ran through five editions, four of them spurious; from which we may suppose that it was held worth the pirating.

The story has at least one element of true tragedy: the ruin of a good man through his own error. In the opening of the play *King Gorboduc*, like *King Lear*, divides his realm during his lifetime between his two sons, Ferrex and Porrex, of whom the younger murders the elder and is thereafter murdered by his mother; the people rise and murder both King and Queen, the nobles suppress the revolt, and civil war and universal disaster ensue. With Senecan correctness these events are narrated and moralised on merely; the abilities of the gentlemen of the Inner Temple were not taxed by any violent happenings on the stage. There are five acts, interspersed by choruses, and each act is preceded by a dumb-show, as in the play scene in *Hamlet*. In his *Defence of Poesy*, Sidney condemns the play's neglect of the unities of place and time, but praises its "notable morality". For the first time in drama the authors employ blank verse: the unrhymed decasyllabic line, which, however, had already appeared in 1557 in Surrey's translation of the *Aeneid*. We can at least thank scholarship for having introduced that mode to the tragic stage; but Marlowe and Shakespeare were to discover what might be done with it.

Decidedly less lumbering than *Gorboduc* is *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, written by one Thomas Hughes of Gray's Inn, with some assistance from seven other members of that sodality, including Francis Bacon. (There is a false scent here for the Baconians, for it seems their hero assisted only with the introductory dumb-shows.) It was played before Elizabeth at Greenwich in 1588. There is exceptional pride and tidiness in the writing, even in the printing; as though Mr Hughes and his associates were resolved to improve on the example of *Gorboduc* and set once for all (if only on the bookshelf) a standard for native tragedy on the Roman model. They found in Malory a theme of adultery, incest and avenging fate as promising as any yielded by Greek legend. The Senecan apparatus comes into play at the very beginning: the lake of Limbo, the Stygian pool, Charon's boat and Pluto's pits are duly mentioned in the first four lines, together with such other nouns and adjectives of dismal import as there is room for. But the balance of the action is studiously planned; so is the mimed spectacle, chorus-wise, before each act, and the chorus

in judgment after. Nor does this play's unquestionable dignity lie in its outward shaping alone. Read it trying to believe in it, as an actor confronts his part, and you may find that it stirs you. Here is the mortally wounded Arthur by the bier of the son who died in giving him his death-blow:

Yea, though I conqueror die, and full of fame,
Yet let my death and parture rest obscure.
No grave I need, O fates! nor burial rites,
Nor stately hearse, nor tomb with haughty top;
But let my carcase lurk; yea, let my death
Be aye unknown, so that in every coast
I still be feared, and looked for every hour.

Is there not here a whiff of the sea-roke that hangs over Tennyson's *Lyonesse*? For all we know, the authors may have believed that they had erected an enduring monument. But, alas, they were out of tune with our lusty young theatre, and *The Misfortunes* stands only as an exhibit in the museum of distinguished efforts. Great works of art are not brought into being by taking thought as to what great art should be.

In this early encounter of classics and romantics, how came it that Sidney, himself a romantic according to the popular idea, whose "Fool, quoth my Muse to me, look in thy heart and write" is an unfailing specific for poets who find themselves tongue-tied through fear of the rules—how came it that Sidney ranged himself on the losing side? The first answer must be that in every contest worth the waging, as this assuredly was, there must be good men on the losing side; defeated, their virtue passes into the victors. Moreover, Sidney was an aristocrat, and the theatre, while dependant on noble patronage, drew its life-blood from the people. The only accusation to be made against him is that he failed to foresee a marriage that had not yet been arranged. The contemporary tragedy he attacked was thriving but chaotic, the very negation of that order and system that discerning Elizabethans had good reason to approve. In 1586 he fell at Zutphen, lamented by soldiers, poets and men in every walk of life. That was more than ten years before Shakespeare produced the first part of *Henry IV*. How could Sidney know, when he wrote his *Defence of Poesy*, what would one day be made of a hotch-potch drama, "neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns"?

The Senecans were defeated, but the theatre should ac-

knowledge that they left their mark. Seeking to impose fetters, they succeeded in imposing only the notion that style was acceptable to a cultivated auditory; they led us towards blank verse as a decorous medium for stage speech. Armed as they were with the authority that all-respected learning conferred, it is a significant fact that something in the English spirit checked them at the very point where authority becomes authoritarian. The clerkly poet might write by the rules so long as it was for a clerkly, or courtly, audience; but they mysteriously played him false when he sought to support himself by writing for mad actors and the turbulent theatre of the inn-yard. To pursue the subject further would take us far afield, not without profit perhaps to any who wonder how it was we never produced a Racine, and why the French had to wait for a revolution before they quite understood Shakespeare or achieved a romantic drama of their own. It leads us to compare the self-governing, order-loving cussedness of the English people, who would not tolerate a nobility to which commoners might not aspire, and on whom even the absolute-minded Tudors dared not thrust a standing army, with the sad submission of those others, who by enduring these evils invited tyranny, class cleavage, and the state protection and control of letters and the arts. And we may conclude that when our theatre, at this crisis of its development, proved as unruly as our unruly selves, it established itself once for all as a part of our natural self-expression, and as a free institution.

It should also be observed that the Senecans, following their master, freely sanctioned the exhibition of ghosts and the spilling of blood. In these matters the popular stage had no quarrel with them at all.

Chapter 4

The Chronicle Plays

DIFFERENT AS THESE four tragedies are, they have one feature in common: they are all concerned with historical or near-historical happenings. They therefore belong to the category of the Chronicle Play, a long-lived and peculiarly English product ranking as Coleridge said, midway between true drama and epic. Its purpose was to set the characters and events of English history before the multitude in dramatic form, much as the Miracle had set those of Bible history, in an age when the Latin chronicles were the sole repository of information about the country's past. But in the sixteenth century the historical writings of Fabyan, Polydore Vergil, More, Hall, Holinshed, Stow and Camden became successively available to the dramatist, and the scope of the Chronicle Play widened to form a continuous sequence from remote times to the defeat of the Armada. "What man of you now", wrote Thomas Heywood in his *Apology for Actors*, "of that weak capacity that cannot discourse of any notable thing recorded even from William the Conqueror, nay from the landing of Brute, until this day?"

The chronicle plays arrange themselves in four passably distinct groups¹:

First, the historical-legendary. Here, surely, we ought to put *Gorboduc* and *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, also not forgetting their popular contemporaries *Appius and Virginia* and *Cambyses*. To these we can add further examples. *Lochrine* (1591) may owe a little to the "W.S." to whom it is in part ascribed, but its bombast and pedantry are alien to the young Shakespeare whom we know; it is more conceivably the work of Peele or Greene. *Lochrine* is the son of Brutus (Heywood's "Brute"), King of Britain, and the story is of "the wars of the Britains and the Huns". *The History of King Leir and his Three Daughters* (c. 1590) is diversely attributed to Kyd, Lodge, Peele and Greene; all or any of them may have had a hand in it. Less pretentious than *Lochrine* but more powerful, it supplies a carpenter's framework for its great successor, but it gives us nothing of Gloucester and his sons, nor of the Fool,

and ends happily. *The Birth of Merlin* (c. 1608), founded like *The Misfortunes* on the Arthurian tale, is uneven, confused and full of irrelevant incident, but has some fine verse in a quasi-Shakespearian strain. Conjecturably a re-writing of the lost *Uther Pendragon* (c. 1597), it was published in 1662 as by Rowley and Shakespeare, but is thought to shew the latter's influence rather than his hand.

Next, the historical proper. Heading the list is Bishop Bale's *King Johan*, dated c. 1550 and already noted; allegorical, controversial and didactic in Morality style. The anonymous *Troublesome Reign of King John* (1588) offers Shakespeare something to work on, which the former play does not; it presents him with the outline of Faulconbridge and blocks out the plot against Arthur; its blank verse is crude and dull, but shews some sign of having been written after *Tamburlaine*. *The True Tragedy of Richard III* (1591) contributes little to its better known successor. *The Famous Victories of Henry V*, contemporaneous with *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, supplies material for *Henry IV* and *Henry V*, but is journeyman's work lacking poetry and fire. On the other hand, scholarship now inclines to the view that *The Contention betwixt the Two Famous Houses of York and Lancaster* and its sequel *The True Tragedy of Richard, Duke of York* (1594), far from being the foundation of Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, 2, 3, are in fact corruptions of those plays. Peele's *Edward I* (c. 1591) is of superior quality, but is marred, in deference to anti-Spanish feeling, by his scurrilous treatment of Queen Elinor. Still more striking is *The Reign of King Edward III* (1590); here, interwoven with history as recorded by Hollinshed, is Bandello's tale of the Countess of Salisbury. Certain scenes in this play are much more than mere chronicle-drama, and have been ascribed to Shakespeare, to Marlowe, to Kyd and to Greene. As such hybrid works emerge, as the nascent dramatist proceeds from the narration of events to the posing of character in conflict, the chronicle play is transformed into something finer, and our classification ceases to be valid. Greene's *James IV of Scotland* (c. 1590) challenges it: Marlowe's *Edward II* (c. 1592) defies it, as much as any History in the Shakespearean canon. Finally, it is interesting to note how wary the writers of chronicle drama become as they draw near to their own times. A case in point is Samuel Rowley's guarded treatment of events under Henry VIII, *When You See Me You Know Me* (1604). In the same year Thomas Heywood, who had also shared in the production of an *Edward IV* (c. 1599), is no less cautious and more skilful in his handling

of the reigns of Mary and her successor, *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody*, or the Troubles of Queen Elizabeth. The very titles of these companion pieces have a furtive, censor-eluding air.

Thirdly, the biographical. Here also the censor would be on the alert if the subject was a personage of political significance or an English Worthy of the old faith. Sir Edmund Tilney's "Mend this" may still be seen in the script of *Sir Thomas More* (c. 1595). This noble play is of multiple authorship, but Shakespeare's hand in it is now acknowledged and it is included in a recent edition of his works.² The martyr is presented as the most lovable of English gentlemen, and there are some engaging scenes which tell us a good deal about the kind of reception that was accorded to a band of players when they visited a private house, and how they would set about giving their show. Much inferior, and uncertainly ascribed to "W.S.", is a *Thomas Lord Cromwell* (c. 1601), from which one may infer that the censorship was not always intolerant. *The First Part of the true and honourable history of the Life of Sir John Oldcastle, the good Lord Cobham* (1599) is the joint work of Munday, Drayton and others. Oldcastle—whose name Shakespeare borrowed for his fat knight and then discarded—was the leader of the Lollards; the second part, presumably narrating his death at the stake, is lost. There is a crude Wat Tyler play, *The Life and Death of Jack Straw* (1591), which may have contributed a little to Jack Cade in *Henry VI*, 2. There are plays on Buckingham, Wolsey, Hotspur and other names renowned in history. There is one in celebration of the swash-buckling Devonian Sir Thomas Stukeley, who also figures in Peele's *Battle of Alcazar*, and makes a glamorous end. In 1604 Dekker and Webster collaborated in a *Sir Thomas Wyatt*, incorporating in it, as is believed, some scenes from Dekker's *Lady Jane Grey* of two years before; this latter was not finished, possibly because Tilney intervened—but the text is lost. The line goes on through Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* (1633) and beyond; far beyond, indeed, for biographical drama is no stranger to the theatre of to-day.

Lastly the popular-legendary, with a pedigree running back to the mummers and their St George. Here the names chiefly to be noted are those of Anthony Munday and Robert Greene. The theme of two rival magicians in Munday's *John a Kent and John a Cumber* (1594) is handled on a broader scale and more amusingly in Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* of four years earlier. Munday is at his best (Chettle assisting) in two Robin Hood plays: *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of*

Huntingdon and *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* (1598). The Earl, alias Robin Hood, is presented as that perennial English hero, the lighthearted and chivalrous challenger of authority; his consort is the nobly-born Maid Marion, his court a companionship of kindred spirits, his stronghold Sherwood Forest. In *George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield* (1590)—a pinner was so called because he rounded up stray cattle and put them in a pinfold or pound—the second of these two authors³ interweaves the Robin Hood strand with border forays and high rebellion, all conducing to the glory of the invincible George; the end is revelry, in which the kings of England and Scotland drink and make merry with the common people. All three plays exhale the scent of the countryside; with no more than a whiff or two from the classic Arcady this would be the air that Silvius and Phoebe breathed. They are equally eloquent of the Englishman's aversion to any parade of governmental power. Just as Royalty still asks leave at Temple Bar, King Edward and his men are not allowed to enter Wakefield until they have vailed, *i.e.* lowered, their staves to the town's all-powerful Shoemakers. In the last lines of the play he confirms in perpetuity this ancient custom of Vail-staff, adding to the rustic George—who by the way is his host for the night—

If any ask a reason why, or how,
Say, English Edward vailed his staff to you.

The *you*, needles to say, must be spoken to rhyme with *how*; for here is one of those final couplets in which the stage long delighted.

Chapter 5

Broadsheet Drama

AKIN TO THE chronicle play yet in a class by themselves, there were certain tragedies of a popular-domestic character, culled from the annals of real life. The stock dies hard; it endures in *Maria Martin*, and there is perhaps some trace of it in the reconstructions of famous crimes or scandals which are now and again to be seen in the west end of London. In the period with which we are at present concerned notable examples are *Arden of Feversham* (c. 1591), and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (c. 1606); these are based respectively on stories to be found in Hollinshed and Stow. There is also *A Warning for Fair Women* (c. 1599), which rehearsed from a contemporary account "the most tragical and lamentable murder of Master George Sanders of London, Merchant, nigh Shooter's Hill"—the ballad-monger's style is unmistakable. Of these three the first two, and especially the first, rank as works of art. A few authorities have insisted that *Arden* is by Shakespeare, but it may equally well be the work of Kyd. The *Tragedy* actually bears Shakespeare's name on the title page of its second edition. But the crime which this latter play commemorates took place in 1604, when he was already confronting evil on a vaster scale; Heywood is a better guess. The *Warning*, if only on the score of immaturity, fails to support any such claim.

All are murder plays; but of the three authors, whoever they may have been, the man who wrote *Arden* had the keenest eye for the elements in a borrowed tale that suit the theatre. The avaricious, uxorious cuckold, doomed from the opening and sensing it; the guilty wife, by birth of higher rank than his, who takes her lover from a lower; the currish object of her desire—these three make up a triangle which has the true dramatic balance. The play's economy is strict; there is no sub-action irrelevant to the main theme. The drift to murder is fated, and manifest to all three protagonists. Alice Arden herself, hounded by a passion which the better part of her loathes, has been thought not unworthy to stand with *Phaedra* and *Lady Macbeth*. One critic in search of a comparison turned to Zola, thinking perhaps of that stifling room in the Passage du Pont Neuf where Thérèse Raquin and her Laurent made an

end of things, for the Arden home has something of the same fell quality.¹ This is as much as to say that the play is strong in what we call atmosphere. We have ransacked old wardrobes in pursuit of bombazine horror; here is a horror older but no less authentic, waiting only to be evoked.

There is no such subtlety in *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, merely the fury of a man whose losses have turned him mad. William Calverley, who stabs his wife and slays his children, is an exhibition part for a Kean or a Lemaitre. The conflagration is brief and fierce, and leaves a blackened ruin. *A Warning to Fair Women* is a sprawling piece of work, not by any means reinforced by the auxiliary dumb-shows, in which the allegorical figures of the Morality are resuscitated. As in *Arden* this real-life murder springs from adulterous love, but it is murder at the *Maria Martin* level, for such simple souls as thronged to gape at the hangings which in fact ensued; one of the best strokes in the play is the unconcerned talk of the Newgate carpenters as they make all ready.

Something however all these pieces have in common: in essence they are of the realist school. They are concerned with actual happenings to ordinary English people of the middle class. Murder is invested with no glamour of kingship or exotic passion. The common gibbet awaits it, not the axe. Overmastering desire or hate explode under the pressure, not of great events, but of the domestic round. The scene is dressed with the chairs and tables—one had almost said the cooker and refrigerator—of a home. Shakespeare knew the value of the mundane, none better. He drew on it for buckbaskets, sack, applejohns, and Master Shallow's goodly place in Gloucestershire, or for the fireside tale of sprites and goblins from which Hermione is haled to prison, or for the trivial touch at the tremendous moment: pray, you, undo this button. Yet, save in *The Merry Wives*, he did not incline to a middle-class setting, and even the *Wives* break out at last into Windsor Royal Park; whether or no he handled *Arden* it would seem that the four walls of domesticity were not for him. The bourgeois comedy of that day was to culminate in Ben Jonson and his like; bourgeois tragedy, cleansed of horror, in Heywood's gentleman-hearted masterpiece, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. As for horror unadulterated and free of the trammels of the humdrum, it was to find some scope in Marlowe and Shakespeare and more in Webster, Tourneur and Ford. But already it was possible to savour the delights of slaughter among persons of quality. The court of Spain furnished more

promising material than could any English home for the delectation of a greedy and iron-nerved public:

Horatio murdered in his Father's bower,
Vile Serberine by Pendringano slain,
False Pendringano hang'd by quaint device,
Fair Isabella by herself misdone,
Prince Balthazar by Belimperia stabbed,
The Duke of Castile and his wicked son
Both done to death by old Heironimo,
My Belimperia fall'n as Dido fell,
And good Heironimo slain by himself—
Aye, these were spectacles to please my soul.

No one could call *The Spanish Tragedy* middle-class.

Chapter 6

The Tragedy of Blood

TO INVITE AN easy laugh at Kyd's expense without at once saying more about him would be doing small justice either to his quality or his significance.¹ Not only does Ben Jonson link him with Lyly and Marlowe for comparison with Shakespeare, albeit to the disadvantage of all three, but he was a dominating influence in the theatre into which young Shakespeare made his way.

We have seen that the popular audience had no great use for the Senecan style, unity or reticence, and that *Appius* and *Cambyzes* were more to its liking than *Gorboduc*. Yet the Elizabethan tragedy of blood learned something from the classic school. To a great extent it discarded irrelevant comic relief, substituting scenes of lyricism and pathos, of pomp and splendour, that were more germane to the plot. It adopted the Senecan revenge-motive, and the Senecan use of ghosts. Still more important, it employed blank verse, which it infused with its own fierce passion.

The Spanish Tragedy (c. 1587) sets the type. The gallant Horatio, son to Heironimo, Marshal of Spain, brings back to the Spanish court Balthazar, a prince of Portugal, as prisoner on parole. He, Horatio, loves Belimperia, formerly plighted to one Andrea, whom Balthazar has slain in single combat before the play begins. But Balthazar loves her too; and an intriguing scoundrel named Lorenzo, backing the suit of Balthazar for private reasons, surprises Horatio when he is in converse with Belimperia, and hangs him in an arbour outside his father's house. Heironimo, on beholding his son's body, goes mad with grief and plans an all-embracing revenge. Being in charge of the court entertainments with which the action of the play is diversified, he stages a performance of a suitably violent tragedy (it is *Soliman and Perseda*), distributes the parts among his intended victims as best fits his purpose, and contrives that the deaths which end the play within a play shall be real and not feigned. A blood-bath ensues, as may be gathered from the lines just quoted, which are spoken by the ghost of Andrea. To complete the grisly tale it may be added that Heironimo,

before stabbing the Duke of Castile and himself, has plucked his own tongue out by the roots and hurled it on the stage.

The play's success was phenomenal. In invited, not a sequel—it could hardly do that, since all the principals were dead, but a *First Part*, believed to be not Kyd's. It continued to attract as a never failing stand-by after his lifetime, when the finer taste disdained it. Henslowe, an entrepreneur not given to wasting money, found it worth his while to pay Jonson for additions to the script in 1601 and 1602. It is suggestive that these do not augment its horrors, but that they enrich the part of Heironimo, which was the creation of Henslowe's son-in-law and leading actor, Alleyn. Evidently it was not only the horrors that drew, but also the star part. The finest audience in London would flock to see Irving in plays that were, considered as literature, fustian. The audiences that flocked to *The Spanish Tragedy* could not see too much of Alleyn as Heironimo, and followed him breathlessly as he exhibited every facet of the old man's madness in turn; but they were listening to lines in which fustian was interwoven with threads of finer quality. Heironimo's

O eyes! no eyes, but fountains fraught with tears;
O life! no life, but lively form of death;

his far-fetched but musical

The blustering winds, conspiring with my words,
At my lament have mowed the leafless trees,
Disrobed the meadows of their flowered green,
Made mountains marsh with springtide of my tears,
And broken through the brazen gates of hell;

or

Sweet boy, how art thou changed in death's black shade!
Had Proserpine no pity on thy youth,
But suffered thy fair crimson-coloured spring
With withered winter to be blasted thus?

are not "mighty" lines; they topple on the verge of rant and sometimes topple over; but if well spoken they have a lyrical-dramatic power beyond the ken of the gentlemen who composed *Gorboduc*. Not only is Heironimo full of modulations, however extravagant, that are tempting to virtuosity in speech, but also the part bristles with acting points; it is perhaps the first great part for a great player.

Little is known of Thomas Kyd. It is believed that he was born in 1558 and died in 1594; his frequent use of Latin suggests that he was a man of some education. Only one other play is certainly his, a *Pompey the Great*, otherwise known as *Cornelia*, from the French and in the Senecan mode; published in 1954, it does not seem to have been played. Among others more or less doubtfully attributed to him are the *Soliman and Perseda* of which he made use in *The Spanish Tragedy*, *Arden of Feversham*, an early *Hamlet*, and a *Taming of a Shrew* which bequeathed a great deal of material to its better known successor of nearly the same name. He belongs to the theatre more than to literature, being the first considerable instance of an actors' playwright; he points the way to a golden age in which both arts moved forward hand in hand with mutual understanding, vying with each other in achievement.

Chapter 7

The Scholar Dramatists

WE CANNOT TELL whether Kyd's Latin proclaims him a university man, or whether he acquired it as a law-writer. But the others of the group generally known as Shakespeare's predecessors were all graduates, scribbling for fame, or a living, or both. The publisher of those days was in a strong position. He was an indispensable adjunct to the writer. Copyright was unknown and he could pirate with impunity, sending a stenographer to a new play if he chose. Royalties also were unknown, and he paid his author with a lump sum which as a rule was miserably small. There were three ways in which a needy or ambitious man could advance himself by means of his pen. One was to dedicate his work to a patron, who would be expected at least to respond with a gratuity; if the patron was rich there was the further hope of employment in his household as tutor, secretary or what not; if influential, of a government post, such as Spenser obtained with Sir Walter Raleigh's help. Another was free-lance journalism, in which a scholar and poor gentleman might sell his soul for a very low price indeed: in Nashe's *Pierce Penniless* (1592) we catch a glimpse of the contemporary Grub Street, and it is not pleasant. The third, more alluring to an adventurous spirit and much more rewarding, was to write for the theatre, an irregular institution, half petted, half frowned on, but wholly flourishing.

Of these scholar dramatists all save one wrote perforce for a double public: a cultured court and a round-eyed populace. For them noble Romans must rub shoulders with English worthies, dainty lyrics with the exchanges of the taproom, wit with buffoonery, dignity with horrors. The magic of the theatre must somehow hold these opposites in poise. But ambition and necessity alike impelled the scholar dramatists to hasten the marriage that Sidney failed to foresee.

The men we now have to consider were Shakespeare's forerunners in two senses. Their careers began and ended before his: the first of their plays came out some ten years before *Love's Labour's Lost*, the last some ten years before *The Tempest*. Also, with the single exception of Nashe, they are perceptibly his forerunners in his art; however he may have

transformed and exalted what he drew from them, in one way or another they helped to shape him.

LYLY

John Lyly,¹ born in or about 1553 of well-to-do parents, was educated at Magdalen College, Oxford, and graduated master of arts of both universities. A youngster of brilliant wit, and with a graceful turn of phrase and more fantasy than fire, it was natural that he should find his way to the court and not into the maelstrom of the popular stage. This in fact he did, through the influence of Lord Burleigh's son-in-law, the Earl of Oxford. To the end of his days he aspired to the Mastership of the Revels, but had to be content with an illusory hope of the reversion of that office, rising only to the rank of Clerk Comptroller; he enjoyed esteem and security but was ill paid, and more than once protested vigorously to the Queen that he was "still waiting". He devised plays and other court entertainments during the heyday of the reign, and eked out his slender earnings by pamphleteering on the gentlemanly side when puritanism became restive in the Marprelate controversy. As dramatist, his influence on Shakespeare is unmistakable; on English literature it is less evident but was indeed profound, for he constituted himself the chief apostle of Euphuism.

The Greek *euphuēs* means well-formed, and it was the avowed aim of the Euphuists to impose formal constraint on the riotous English tongue. To this laudable, and in truth necessary, end they brought to bear an alien pedantry and fantastication analogous to the pedantry with which the Senecans had menaced our drama and to the fantastication with which our tailors, at great gain to themselves, had bedevilled our notions of a well-dressed man. Euphuism did us same service while it was the fashion, becoming for a space the hall-mark of a well-spoken man. It brought us our first considerable experience of snobbery in letters. It had its counterparts in other countries where young and ardent scholarship followed Italian stylists, sound or bogus, without discriminating. For ourselves, having so much to say and drunk as we were with words of miraculously expanding power, our prime concern was to get it all said; we hardly cared how we said it, it was such fun to say; verse had its rules, but not prose. Now, from sources that were in fact decadent, we imbibed a style that could invest the shallowest platitude with profundity, strangeness and grace. Unceasing

use of the antithesis gave it a kind of booming profundity; strangeness was deliberately achieved by impressing unusual adjectives and nouns in the service of familiar ideas, or by wresting not perfectly applicable similies from natural history and the science of a bygone day. But its very real grace lay in the balance of its phrasing. Such a style is best illustrated by parody, and Shakespeare's attempt will serve:

Harry, I do not only marvel where thou spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied: for though the camomile, the more it is tradden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears. . . . There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in our land as pitch: this pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; so doth the company thou keepest: for, Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink, but in tears; not in pleasure, but in passion; not in words only, but in woes also. . . .²

This is deliberately absurd, but it would be no true parody if it were less balanced and clear. If you read a pamphlet of that time you are likely to find its argument continually tangled-up with side-issues, corollaries and instances. But however you may feel about Lyly's *Euphues* in other respects you will at least have to acknowledge its balance and clarity. Shakespeare was ungrateful here, considering his debt to Lyly, although elsewhere he made amends. In the event this snobbery wrought no harm and some lasting good. *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit* and *Euphues and his England* were the rage, ran through many editions, became outmoded, a laughing-stock, and at last faded from view among the curiosities of literature. Yet the English novel owes Lyly something, and his cadences are still echoed faintly in our legislature when a great orator speaks on a great occasion.

But to Lyly the dramatist the Euphuistic mode was perfectly congenial. Grace of diction was innate in him, a blending of the strong and the familiar was of the essence of his fantasy, and in his hand the antithesis—light and airy, not sham-profound—became the chief tool of his craft. See how it helps him in *Campaspe*: Alexander the Great is in the studio of Apelles, whom he has ordered to paint his lovely captive's portrait. Watching the man at work, the conqueror is fascinated, and would like to have a try at it himself; it is Lyly's chance to administer, in the voice of Apelles, an artist's snub:

ALEXANDER Lend me thy pencil, Apelles; I will paint, and thou shalt judge.

APELLES Here.

ALEXANDER The coal (*he means charcoal*) breaks.

APELLES You lean too hard.

ALEXANDER Now it blacks not.

APELLES You lean too soft.

ALEXANDER This is awry.

APELLES Your eye goeth not with your hand.

ALEXANDER Now it is worse.

APELLES Your hand goeth not with your mind.

Alexander soon decides that if one's hand, eye and mind must all draw together he had "rather be setting of a battle than drawing of a board". Needless to say, this style of dialogue is meat and drink to Diogenes, when the great man visits him in his retreat:

ALEXANDER How happened it that you would not come out of your tub to my palace?

DIOGENES Because it was as far from my tub to your palace as from your palace to my tub.

There is much more in the same style; but such excerpts do scant justice to *Campaspe*, which is as pretty a thing as its name. The off-moments of very important persons are a proper subject for comedy, and here is one, framed in the clash of arms; it is caught to the life, delicately. Mighty Alexander, torn by passion for his beautiful Theban, shakes himself free with a gentleman's sense of humour, blesses a union of true hearts and marches off to glory.

In *Sapho and Phao* it is a goddess who beguiles an idle hour, less creditably. Venus, planning to abase the pride of Sapho, Queen of Syracuse, endows a young ferryman named Phao with more than natural beauty. Sapho, beholding him, becomes the prey of a humiliating and hopeless passion; but unfortunately Venus catches a glimpse of him too, and likewise succumbs to the charms she herself has conferred. Conflict follows; Cupid is armed by his mother with certain special arrows of an antidotal kind, and is ordered to cool the ardour of Sapho. He does; but the wretched child is swayed from his filial duty and plants a second and equally chilling arrow in the bosom of Phao, thereby making the advances of Venus repugnant to him. This is a matter of great bitterness to Venus, who is not as young as she used to be, and is aggravated be-

cause Cupid, not content with upsetting everything, has taken a fancy to Sapho and sits in her lap, stuffing himself with sweets and refusing to go home with his infuriated mother. Poor Phao is the chief sufferer from this embroilment; he loses his job and wanders forth into the wilderness, mediating on the dire events that may follow when Olympus interests itself too much in the affairs of men. Quite as funny (for these scenes are truly funny, as we shall one day rediscover) are the relations of Venus with Vulcan, sweaty from the forge and out of humour with a capricious concubine whose allurements are beginning to pall.

There is more delight in these early trifles of Lyly than in the heavily allegorical *Endymion*. It is strange that Lord Leicester's disgrace should have been a permitted theme for a court show; the explanation may be that all these plays were done by children, who might indeed say innocently a number of things that grown-ups could only say with too much meaning. The same child troupe were entrusted with his *Mother Bombye*, a well-built work modelled on Terence. But in all Lyly's plays there is something of the same elusive charm, not of air and fire so much as of fragrance and candlelight, encouraging to youth and rosy cheeks, indulgent of royal wrinkles; well-mannered and kind. Gluck might have set him to music admirably; so, in his way, might Offenbach. If they knew nothing of him, it is enough that Shakespeare knew a great deal, and made no attempt to disguise how much. When we wonder how it was that on a stage given to bloodshed and the tramp of conquering hosts he was able to present such women as he did, daring, witty and desirable equal-opposites of their men, or the sparring-partnership of Beatrice and Benedick, or Rosalind prattling happily about Hero of Sestos, we shall find plenty of parallel passages that reveal how much he drew from the humane and civilised Lyly.

GREENE, LODGE, PEELE AND NASHE

To turn from Lyly, with his safe pittance and meagre perquisites, to Greene and his circle, is to pass from Whitehall to an Alsatia where there was every inducement to lie in the gutter and gaze at the stars. With the exception of Lodge, who seems to have had the means and the will to extricate himself, not one of them lived out his forty-first year. Robert Greene,³ born in 1558, the son of a Norwich saddler, obtained a sizarship at Cambridge, graduated as B.A. of St John's and, after an interval of travel and debauchery abroad, as M.A. of Clare. He acquired a wife and child whom he later deserted, tasted

some years of high success in London, consorted with players, wits and rogues of both sexes, fell on evil days, and died in squalor in 1592. Thomas Lodge,⁴ born in 1558, the son of a some-time Lord Mayor of London, M.A. of Trinity, Oxford, and a member of Lincoln's Inn, soon abandoned the drama for more gentlemanly writing; after making two long voyages he turned Catholic, practised with credit as a doctor of medicine, and died at a relatively ripe age in 1625. George Peele,⁵ born in 1558 of a good Devon family, became M.A. of Christ Church, Oxford, lived rakishly with some assistance from noble patrons, and died—according to one account of the pox—in 1596. Thomas Nashe,⁶ born in 1567, the son of a preacher, was educated at Cambridge and Oxford and passed B.A. of the latter university. After some foreign travel he plunged into journalism, proving himself a brilliant and ferocious but loyal partisan; his death in 1601 ended an existence of continual struggle in the course of which, said an epitaph, he never paid shoemaker or tailor.

Of the four, Greene is by far the outstanding figure. As a dramatist, a poet, a novelist and a pamphleteer he was versatile, fluent and prolific; in a night and a day, in Nashe's judgment, "he would have yarked up a pamphlet as well as in seven year". His lyrics are charming. Dissolute though his life was, he was subject to moods of self-abhorrence and repentance that were not the less heartfelt because his confessions sold extremely well. Like some other sinners of his kind he seems to have retained an unobscured perception of the best that life has to offer. He understood and loved the English landscape, and could paint it in a dirty London lodging. He could draw a chaste woman firmly and without excess of sentiment, which is a rare gift in a loose-living man. In the theatre he knew every trick, mechanical and other, and employed them all. Here he was a protean copyist, working any and every profitable vein yet never denying wholly the personal quality that might have carried him to greatness. His *Alphonso, King of Aragon*, full of pomp and carnage, follows the beat of *Tamburlaine*, although the verse of Marlowe is beyond his power. *Orlando Furioso* is also for Marlowe's public, and in Orlando's made scenes clearly for Kyd's. His *Looking Glass for London and England* brings out the hell-fire revivalist in him; he stages the doom of Nineveh as a warning to his own time, and avails himself of the obsolent technique of the Morality. Perhaps he came nearest to an accommodation with his unquiet self in two plays we have already noted: *George a Greene* and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. It has been sug-

gested that he conceived of the second of these as an all-British tale of sorcery that might surpass, or at all events cash in on, the fame of the unapproachable *Faustus*. If that was so, he was in one respect disappointed; for his levitations, perspective glasses, brazen head and the rest of the hocus-pocus amount to no more than rather fearful fun. On the other hand he offsets these wonders with the delectable picture of Margaret, the Fair Maid of Fressingfield, and her sweet-smelling dairy, matters beneath Marlowe's notice, although Shakespeare did not disdain them. And as a concession to a fading taste we have the old Vice of the interlude, lightly disguised as Miles, Friar Bacon's poor scholar, who in the end rides off to perdition on the devil's back. His maturest work is his *James IV*, which we have hesitated to include among the chronicle plays because it is so nearly romantic-historical drama. The Lady Ida, for love of whom the king plans to murder his queen, embodies perfectly the chastity that Greene excelled in portraying; she qualifies for the category of Shakespeare's noble women. Yet here again we must charitably suppose that the author's penury impelled him to solicit any and every vote; before *A Midsummer Night's Dream* had seen the light he encased this play, that might have been his masterpiece, in a neat but irrelevant trifle about Oberon, king of fairies.

Of the confessional tracts in which Greene publicly scourged himself for gain, the most remembered is his *Groatsworth of Wit*, written not long before his death. That is because it contains his celebrated attack on actors in general, "antics garnished in our colours" and in particular on Shakespeare, the "upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapt in a Player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bumbast out a blank verse as the best of you, and being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country". Chettle, his editor, handsomely dissociated himself from this waspishness in the preface to *A Kind Heart's Dream*. But in fact Greene was venting a grievance which to himself and others was real enough. For where would the scholar dramatist be if the theatre itself turned literate, and began to supply its own needs? That he himself might copy, borrow and patch in his play-making was understood; but it was peculiarly galling to the once favourite Master of Arts that the process should now be carried on more efficiently and economically within the theatre walls, and by a youngster from a provincial grammar school. The *Groatsworth* invites compassion, not indignation. Greene also was

young in years, but old in body and mind; bloated, diseased, destitute. He was still something of a celebrity and was loved by a few to the last, and when he lay dead the landlady whose bill he had not settled put a chaplet of bays on his brow.

Lodge was chiefly active in the theatre as a collaborator. Many plays are attributed to him in part, only one in whole. *The Wounds of Civil War*, written in admonition of England and in compliment to the Queen, takes the contest of Marius and Sulla from North's Plutarch and thus foreshadows faintly the great Roman plays to come; but the pageantry of Sulla's triumph recalls *Tamburlaine*, its near predecessor. Lodge was designed by mind and temperament more for literature than the drama, and the rough-and-tumble of theatre life quickly became distasteful to him. Shakespeare, as actor, seems to have taken less and less pleasure in making himself a motley to the view, and gave up that side of his profession when he could afford to do so. Lodge, having other resources, could refuse to tie his pen, as he put it, "to penny knaves' delight". His poems have the grace appropriate to a gentlemen's Arcadia; he wrote feelingly of the scandals of usury; in fiction he was an observant pupil of Lyly. Oddly, it is for his fiction, not his plays, that the theatre owes him most; for his *Rosalynde*, written on a voyage to the Canaries, provided the plot for *As You Like It* and all the leading characters save Jacques and Touchstone.

Peele, vivacious and versatile, plays a bigger part in theatre history. He distinguished himself while at Oxford with an *Iphigenia* from the Greek of Euripides. His *Arraignment of Paris*, rococo-classical and lusciously worded, was played before Elizabeth, and carries to a peak the flattery from the stage which she found acceptable. *David and Bethsabe*, now definitely assigned to him, was revived by William Poel, and in those sympathetic hands proved to be a work of gentleness and beauty. His *Battle of Alcazar* is largely an effort in the *Tamburlaine* manner. It is believed that *The Old Wives' Tale* was in Milton's mind when he wrote *Comus*. His *Edward I*, with its unworthy gibes at Queen Elinor, has been mentioned already. There are a number of plays in which he had, or may have had, a hand as part-author, and he was responsible for two pageants in the Lord Mayor's shows of his time.

Nashe, the battling journalist of the Marprelate conflict and the fierce defender of Greene's memory against the attacks of one Gabriel Harvey, had a finger in many pies, the theatre being among them. He narrowly escaped gaol for his share in the suppressed *Isle of Dogs*, and has been credited with the

completing of Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*. His *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (the title plays on the name of Will Somers, court fool to Henry VIII) is a pleasant blend of interlude and masque but shows no great dramatic power. And indeed the partisanship which Nashe effected does not conduce to the writing of fine drama. Yet what matter, if the man could pen such lines as these, in plague-time:

Beauty is but a flower
Which wrinkles will devour;
Brightness falls from the air;
Queens have died young and fair;
Dust hath closed Helen's eye;
I am sick, I must die—
Lord, have mercy on us!

Chapter 8

In Triumph through Persepolis

IT MAY HAVE been noticed how often *Tamburlaine* has been mentioned in these pages. This could hardly be avoided. Time and again we have had (and will have) to invoke the Scythian champion, for the road he treads is a road by which our drama has to go. Poor Herod missed it through his propensity for raging in circles; Cambyses found it and made some headway; now Alphonsus and Orlando march in the conqueror's train, but cannot wear his panoply or match his stride. *Tamburlaine* was produced in 1587. The next year was to see the destruction of the Armada; yet for theatre people the one date is as significant as the other, for with its appearance the English poetic drama became an integrated thing, and the metrical form which the Senecans had imposed on it stood revealed as an instrument of undreamt-of power.

The man who brought this to pass was twenty-three at the time. Christopher Marlowe¹ was born in 1564, the son of a Canterbury shoemaker. He became M.A. of Benet's College (now Corpus Christi), Cambridge, is believed to have seen service in the Netherlands and certainly travelled abroad. He entered the theatre, in a few years had set his mark on it for ever, and died in 1593 in a brawl at Deptford.

Marlowe affords a most satisfying example of that kind of intuition which in a crucial time takes charge and wins the day. Looking back on *Tamburlaine* and knowing as we now do what was to follow, we might almost suppose that a committee of experts had enquired into the state of English tragedy, had made certain recommendations for its improvement, and had appointed to the job the kind of young man who could be relied on to carry them out. But progress in the arts is not made along such ordered lines. "Before the grammarians or philosophers framed their laws", says Ben Jonson, "there were many excellent poets that fulfilled them"; and we all can think of industrious practitioners who learn the critics' jargon and plod on hopefully by new rules, wondering whether they will one day be accounted great. It is hard to believe that Marlowe sought or received much guidance, or that he plotted with an entirely cool brain the course he was to pursue. To a man

possessed of the spirit the inessential vanishes and the essential stands out clear; it was for such clarity of perception that the saints wooed the spirit with prayer and fasting. To any poet in that word-drunk age, to be so possessed meant also that, waking and even in his dreams, he was in feverish pursuit of phrases, rhythms, images, that dared him to capture them and set them down. And that Marlowe was so possessed we may not doubt.

That is not to say that he did not know what he was after. The eight-line prologue of *Tamburlaine* is definite, almost blunt:

From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threatening the world with high astounding terms,
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
View but his picture in this tragic glass,
And then applaud his fortune as you please.

His purpose is to clear the tragic stage of trumpery; the broom he will use is the mighty iambic line. We may note that with Marlowe it was always the line; that was the unit he built with. The follow-through, which the French call *enjambement*, he left for the most part to certain successors who wrought their own high magic with it, and to many who were to use it with increasing fluency as their vital force waned and they had less and less to say.

He is the embodiment of a Renaissance England that has not yet forgotten older ways of thought but is exulting in a sense of liberation, waist-deep in shadow with its face turned to the sun; of those exciting days in every springtide when we can hear nature drumming as she musters her power. For in that age of ever-expanding horizons and of capacities that seemed to grow as fast it was above all the vision of power that fascinated Marlowe. In *Tamburlaine* it was the power of the sword, in *Faustus* of the black art, in *The Jew of Malta* of riches, in *The Massacre at Paris* and *Edward II* of statecraft. Moreover it is always power according to the predilections of Marlowe himself. He taught epic poetry how to become epic drama, and there was no height he could not scale; but the mountain had come to Mahomet. He died too young, too proud it may be, to learn how humbly a true dramatist dwells in the hearts of his creatures. Three of these plays are

one-man shows; and in all of them the central figure is some facet of Kit Marlowe, conceived by himself and turned over to Ned Alleyn to be made resounding and credible.

It is his singleness of aim that sets him head and shoulders above such men as Greene, who was far more experienced in the playwright's craft but less clearly determined how to use it. But it is to his quality of spirit that he owes his pre-eminence. In the march of *Tamburlaine* there sounds something finer than the brazen note of power; the play is more than a 'prentice's dream of greatness. If that were all, this shepherd boy who wades through slaughter to a chain of thrones would be of no more significance than any hard-riding hero of the movies, or Deadwood Dick in the old penny-dreadfuls—and indeed it must be confessed that his divine Zenocrate is rather like Dick's inflexibly virginal paramour, for Marlowe was not good at women. It is the lure, the vista of power beyond power, the insatiable spirit, that turns the baser metal into gold; and the fusing agent in this alchemy is the poetry. Marlowe-Tamburlaine is poet enough to know the ecstasy of unsatisfied desire. He longs to ride in triumph through Persepolis, to taste "the sweet fruition of an earthly crown"; he does both, and his chariot is drawn by captive kings. But all the time Zenocrate is his for the asking, and from her he holds back until aesthetic sense, as much as chivalry, tells him the moment is fitting.

As everyone knows it was Swinburne, his most ardent eulogist, who in one of criticism's lightning flashes revealed the urge that drives him on. Tamburlaine himself is speaking:

If all the pens that ever poets held
Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,
And every sweetness that inspired their hearts,
Their minds and muses on admired themes;
If all the heavenly quintessence they still
From their immortal flowers of poesy,
Wherein, as in a mirror, we perceive
The highest reaches of a human wit;
If these had made one poem's period,
And all combined in beauty's worthiness,
Yet should there hover in their restless heads
One thought, one grace, one wonder, at the least,
Which into words no virtue can digest. . . .

summing up, says Swinburne, all that could be said or thought of this highest form of spiritual ambition. And Addington

Symonds follows beautifully with the "lust of unattainable things".²

Tamburlaine, with its action firmly held in the grasp of a forthright story, was an ideal first play for a beginner of genius, since it gave full scope to the gifts that he was born with but did not exact too much from a craft that he had still to learn. In *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, which followed, he had again a fairly ordered sequence of events to help him, and was at least sure of a magnificent opening and close; but not everyone would agree with Goethe that the whole of it is nobly planned. In *The Jew of Malta* he tries his hand at the drama of intrigue and blood, and as the play proceeds we become conscious of a pitiful disparity between conception and execution. The beginning is glorious, a paean extolling gems and gold, "infinite riches in a little room". The trouble is that Barabas, unlike the thrusting *Tamburlaine*, has really nowhere to go from there but down and down to a ridiculous end in his own cauldron; Ben Jonson's *Volpone* gloats to much the same effect, but *Volpone* has a firm plot to sustain him. *The Massacre at Paris*, in which power is embodied in the Duc de Guise, is a canvas so vast and diffuse that it defies the critic. But *Edward II* is well knit enough; stemming like *Tamburlaine* from the chronicle plays, it is held in the frame of events, but within that frame true characters take shape and grow. We tend to overstress the resemblance between this play and Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Both indeed present the downfall of a feeble king, but Shakespeare distils a finer essence from the theme. He shews a surer hand in the grouping of opposed forces, the current of his verse carries the action more flowingly along, and it is better verse. For either the mighty line was too positive a medium for the chops and changes of court affairs or, as some moralists hint, Marlowe's control of it was weakening. Fate has left this an open question. We shall never know what more he might have done if, on that evening at Deptford, he had not followed his own Mortimer in quest of countries yet unknown.

If music, majesty and unflagging drive can make a play, *Tamburlaine* is Marlowe's greatest work. If we insist that the first requirement in drama is an interweaving of character and action, we must incline to *Edward II*. Between these two looms the immensity of *Faustus*, claiming to be judged by its finest scenes as a poet is judged by his finest lines; and if that claim is upheld it stands highest of the three.

Having shewn in *Tamburlaine* what he can do in the chronicle mode, Marlowe now turns his attention to an older form

still, to wit the morality; for *Faustus* is a morality as surely as its Seven Deadly Sins are abstractions. His source was the *Faustbuch* of Johannes Spiess. This professed to relate the adventures of a real Doctor Faust, a quack given to necromancy who had flourished in south-western Germany early in the century. Science, as conceived by an age whose astronomy was astrology and whose chemistry was alchemy, had inflamed this Faust with an arrogance of mind that tempted him to sell his soul to the devil for earthly power, and his fate was condign and dreadful when the devil claimed his due. The story was widely read in many languages, as much for its sensational incidents as for any lesson it sought to impart. It must sooner or later have found its way to the stage, and might well have attracted Greene, who among his other tastes had a strong propensity for hell-fire. Instead, it came into the hands of a reprobate poet of twenty-four who was also believed to be an atheist. Let us see what he does with it.

His prologue coldly and dryly announces the argument. Then, before an audience of whom the more turbulent must be kept hushed, on their feet, for two hours and more (but Alleyn was the *Faustus*), the man is disclosed, sitting in his study. Some sixty quiet, grave lines set forth concisely the twists and turns of an intellect that is about to break with God. "Sweet Analytics" have ravished it; but for a man of *Faustus'* wit there are higher aims in life than to dispute well. Shall he pursue his art of medicine? Profitable and honourable, doubtless; but to what end, seeing that he cannot confer eternal life? What of the law? It is a mercenary drudge, too servile and illiberal for him. He reopens his Bible; it tells him that the wages of sin are death, and that no man is without sin. Determinism, then? The power motive takes charge and his choice is made:

What doctrine call you this, *Che sera sera*,
What will be shall be? Divinity, adieu!
These metaphysics of magicians
And necromantic books are heavenly. . . .
O what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence,
Is promised to the studious artisan!
All things that move between the quiet poles
Shall be at my command: emperors and kings
Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;
But his dominion that exceeds in this

Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man:
A sound magician is a mighty god. . . .

thus, in a popular playhouse, did a cobbler's son bestride the chasm between the age of faith and the age of reason. The fearful invocation is made and Mephistophilis appears; this was trap-door stuff, presumably, and certain to thrill and scare the groundlings; yet if you read the scene in the small hours you may be scared too. Greene would have been content with less; not so Marlowe, who hastens us on to an exquisitely ironic situation. On one side of the table, as they do their deal, is a half-sceptic, prepared to take a chance; on the other a suffering fiend who knows what hell is and rebukes his levity:

Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it;
Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God,
And tasted the eternal joys of Heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?
O Faustus! leave these frivolous demands,
Which strike a terror to my fainting soul.

The contract is signed in blood; and for the agreed term Faustus-Marlowe tastes full earthly power. The play, alas, sags and sags again as he expends it in a declining concatenation of fooleries.³ Of these—they include the guying of the Pope—the only one which Tamburlaine-Marlowe could approve is the raising of Helen from the dead. We all know the lines. But we would give something to learn how Alleyn contrived the apparition of the most beautiful woman in the world. William Poel, faced with the problem of presenting a loveliness that every taste in the house would accept without demur, shewed a rare discretion. Marlowe had known better than to let his Helen speak; Poel took that hint and went further. He found the shapeliest model in London and put her in a damped dress that clung to her. She entered downstage and moved slowly upstage; we never saw the face that launched a thousand ships, save through the eyes of Faustus.

The final scene, in which the bond falls due and all hell rises and closes in on him, calls for such mingled dexterity and passion in the playing that an actor who is bold enough to attempt it to-day may soon find himself wondering what Alleyn had that he has not: perhaps that Burbage had not. For a fine Lear, one would think, carries armament enough for Faustus; but Lear is not a lost soul. To plumb the depths of human

suffering is one thing; it is another to be scorched and fried in the flames of a medieval hell. It is with the voice of one already damned that he must compass the small masterstroke of *lente, lente, currite noctis equi*, snatched from Ovid's *Amores*, and proceed to the ecstatic

O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?
See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul—half a drop: ah, my
Christ!
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
Yet will I call on him. . . .

and thence onward and upward, through forty lines of ever changing key, to the sharp staccato of

Ugly hell, gape not! come not, Lucifer!
I'll burn my books! Ah Mephistophilis!

for which ultimate cry he must have in reserve some notes he has not yet used.

The legend of Marlowe's death at a low tavern in Deptford, by a knife-thrust from a "bawdy serving-man" with whom he had quarrelled over a loose woman, originated in contemporary accounts of the event by Beard, Rudierde, Meres and others, who stressed with unction the horrors of an atheist's end; and it has been cherished ever since by the romantically inclined. It was exploded in 1925, when Dr. Leslie Hotson came across the documents in the case.⁴ The tavern was a respectable hostelry; the assailant was a friend, one Ingram Frazer, who struck in self-defence. The question at issue was how to split the bill for a day-long drinking bout. To the chagrin of many the loose woman vanished into thin air. Yet matter enough remained for those who shook their heads and still found a melancholy aptness in Faustus' own epitaph:

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burnèd is Apollo's laurel bough. . . .

The watermen sang *Hero and Leander*, and the prettiest girl in all Arden paid tribute to a dead shepherd.

Chapter 9

A Motley to the View

OUR STEPS HAVE brought us within the shadow of the Colossus himself, and the best an unofficial guide can do is to assume that his party are as well-informed as he is, and draw their attention merely to certain aspects of the tremendous figure. It may be as well to begin by reassuring any, if such there still be, who suspect that the figure is a fraud, and that Stratford's Shakespeare has no right to stand where he does.¹

The heresies, Baconian, Oxfordian and the rest, are not at the moment thriving as they have done in former years. Current research is yielding little if anything that confirms them in point of doctrine, and in fluid times like ours the heretical temperament has many other fields to frolic in. But some day we may once more have to confront a formidable body of opinion which will affirm as strenuously as ever that Shakespeare did not write the plays that bear his name.² The orthodox have themselves partly to thank for the annoyances they have put up with; a single determined sortie might have raised the siege. For the fact is that however hard one may have to argue to uphold the claim of Shakespeare, one would have to argue ten times harder in support of Bacon or of Oxford, if either were set up in his place.

Of the heretics there are two kinds. There are (or were) the cryptophiles, who premised a vast conspiracy of silence in which every literary personage of the day must have been concerned, and whose evidence, when they produced it, was as intricate as their own mental processes. For they had good chess-players' minds, some of them, and are not to be dismissed with ribaldry because we find among them the celebrated names of Pott and Looney. There are also those whose only error is to carry to extremes a kind of fancy portrait-painting which is common enough. All of us are prone to fashion a great man in our own image; to do so fortifies the best in us, flatters our weaknesses, and may even give cover for our vices. No great man has suffered from such reconstruction more than Shakespeare. Dr. Dover Wilson has an excellent passage on this subject. The prosperous-pork-butcher bust in Stratford church is, he points out, precisely the sort

of carving that would be commissioned by honest burghers in homage to a local boy who had made good in a substantial way; it is by implication complimentary to themselves. Persons of finer temper, repelled by the bust and by the wooden engraving of Droeshout which derives from it, may well say that this is no doubt the Man of Stratford who sued one Rogers for thirty-five-and-tenpence and left his poor widow the second-best bed—a perfectly proper bequest, it may be observed, from a father with a married daughter—but that, as clearly, it is not the poet who wrote the plays.

Yet less confusion of thought has sprung from this unhappy piece of sculpture than from the mental effigies we are all free to create, and cannot refrain from creating. The dome-browed sage whom the Germans used to favour; the serene (Lytton Strachey suggested bored) Shakespeare of New Place, scarred but not maimed by mysterious fires; the tragic Shakespeare, who loved and suffered in a manner only to be apprehended fully by Frank Harris³; the gentle, not to say limp, Shakespeare, warranted safe with young virgins and never so happy as on the banks of Avon, or in a sunlit embrasure at Hampton Court, or anywhere out of harm's way; the Shakespeare of the Immortal Memory, lachrymosely toasted at Birthday luncheons, who is all of these, and holy into the bargain, and very, very dead: who shall say how much these projections of our flabby selves have contributed to the rose-pink miasma that envelops him? It is an atmosphere friendly to the weeds of the mind, and must be dispelled, even at the risk of heresy.

A further confusion arises from the man's all-embracing delight in the human species. As a playwright, it is a point of professional honour with him to be the spokesman of his people, not of himself. And they are so many, and so diverse, that we have no difficulty in establishing (if we disregard what does not suit us) that he was a Papist, a Protestant, a militarist, a pacifist, or almost anything we choose. He has been claimed by homosexuals on the strength of certain sonnets; hunting men have praised his eye for the points of a horse; there has been one truly shocking attempt on behalf of the feminists to tie him to the skirts of his mother, his wife, his mistress and his Queen. The canvas is thick with successive botchings, and the heretics insist that the only honest way to restore it is to scrape them all off—and paint another face.

Also the heretics are sustained by certain frailties from which none of us are free. One is snobbery, another is curiosity. There have been some with whom it rankled that the pinnacle of English letters should be in the occupation of a

grammar-school type who made himself a motley to the view, and whose father had been somewhat hesitantly accorded the insignia of a gentleman. And however deplorable it may be, it is a fact that no lively mind can entirely abstain from wondering what would happen if the Stratford racket, as it has been irreverently termed, were all of a sudden blown sky-high.

Paradoxically, nothing argues more strongly that Shakespeare was not an imposter and thief on the grand scale than the degree to which he really did "steal", openly and in the way of business. It was euphemistically said that he had "sources" on which he drew. Not all of his editors revealed, or perhaps knew, the extent of his drawing. Many good people must have been perturbed, when there appeared, in 1779, a collection entitled *Six Old Plays*. It comprises Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*, which is the original of *Measure*, Creed's translation of the *Menaechmi* of Plautus, which begot *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of a—not the—Shrew*, *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* and *The History of King Leir and his Three Daughters*. The editor seems to incline to the view that the writers of these plays (unidentified, save Whetstone and Creed) are much to be congratulated on having furnished the illustrious plagiarist with raw material. He may be right; but all of them produced sound work, good actors' stuff,⁴ and contributed not only a substantial proportion of plot but also characters, lines and even whole scenes to the successors which have eclipsed them. As for the *Shrew*, what should we think if we read in the paper that Mr So-and-so's *Private Life* embodied the best situations and dialogue of Mr Noel Coward's *Private Lives* and was enriched by an underplot from the French? How it would have brightened our almost penal study of Shakespeare if our teachers had been men enough to divulge that he, the paragon of moralists and poets alike, cribbed whenever he had a mind to. And what a long way that would have taken us toward perceiving that great art is most likely to emerge in a time when good artists pilfer ardently from each other.

In our day, Shakespeare's fluent output would have been checked at the start by the courts; he would have been dogged by injunctions and crippled with damages and costs until he gave up writing for want of an "original" theme. But in the time of the first Elizabeth the notion of an author's rights in the product of his pen was, if possible, even more dimly apprehended by theatrical companies than by publishers. If they were infringed, he might vent his indignation in a leaflet, as

Greene did, but there was no monetary redress. The company would as a rule pay the author a few shillings down on approving his scenario. A period would then ensue during which they would get the play, often sheet by sheet, out of him, and he would extract the corresponding instalments of his fee from them. By the time he had delivered the last sheet and received the last instalment, it was likely that he had spent the full sum due, which ranged from six pounds to ten. In justice to the company we must of course remember how much a pound could in those days buy. But from that moment the play was their property. The utmost the author could hope for in the way of further payment was a small bonus if it succeeded; and the company were at liberty to refashion it as, and as often as, they thought desirable.

Play-doctoring has become almost a profession in itself, notably in the United States. In the Elizabethan theatre the play-doctor was constantly in demand, cutting, transposing and interpolating stuff of his own; we cannot say by how much *Faustus* was the better or the worse for his attentions.⁵ Accordingly an actor who was on the salary-list or held a share in the company, and who served also by pulling the plays into shape, was better paid and more secure than the unattached author; and this is known to have been Shakespeare's case.

But the comfortable fortune that he eventually enjoyed was rather the product of his share than of his earnings as a playwright. For this was an actors' theatre; one explanation of its extraordinary vitality is that it was the actor who inspired the dramatist until the dramatist in his turn became the inspiration of the actor. It is clear that Shakespeare quickly made himself an adept at tailoring a part to fit the man who was to play it. A play, when he joined the Burbage management, was a vehicle for acting. Whether tragedy or comedy, it was expected to provide opportunities for the gags of the company's Clown, who became the central figure in the "jig" with which the show ended. Not until the turn of the century could the Clown be charged, with any hope of his complying, to say no more than was set down for him. From the days of Alleyn's first success as Heironimo the popular drama rose to greatness by keeping step with great acting, and it would be hard to say which did more for the other. It is perfectly conceivable that Shakespeare learnt from Richard Burbage, who was his junior in years but his senior in the profession, before Burbage began to learn from him.

A play—then—was not thought of as literature; it existed, so far as it could be said to exist when it was not actually being

played, in the form of the book-keeper's thumbbed and sweaty prompt-copy and plots, and in the scrolls of the players. The last thing the company wished was that their property should be given to the world in print; the pirating publisher's garbled versions were menace enough, and indeed had sometimes to be countered by an authentic edition. It was from time to time revised and "written up". *Hamlet*, itself an adaptation, has a little over two thousand lines in the First Quarto (which is admittedly suspect) and nearly four thousand in the Second; in the posthumous First Folio there are excision and additions, and the total comes to about the same.

The Folio is a great hunting-ground for the heretics. They find that the introductory lines of Ben Johnson which face the frontispiece are unmistakably the lines of a man who has something to conceal. In the frontispiece itself (it is the Droeshout) they note a visage that is not only repellent but suspiciously masklike; and they have combed the text for clues. For all that, the Folio may be brought in evidence against them.

As a production it does more honour to the piety of Heminge and Condell, the actors who assembled it, than to their editorial skill. Compared with the neat First Folio of Jonson's works, which appeared under his own supervision, it is a very amateurish affair. There are many corruptions and some manifest gags. There are certain odd spills-over from the prompt-book—as in *Much Ado*, where one "Jacke Wilson" enters in company with Don Pedro and others, and the names of the comedians Kemp and Cowley are inadvertently substituted for Dogberry and Verges. But these blemishes, that would be shocking if we found them in the Jonson omnibus, do not seem to hurt this first collected edition of Shakespeare. Strangely, they even enhance its charm. Unskilled, however faithful, hands were at work on a task from which the more qualified may, for all we know, have recoiled. If the more qualified did decline it, why did they? Was it because, as some hold, they had been privy to the great conspiracy and, now that the impostor was dead, preferred to forget all about it? Or is the explanation simply that a man of the theatre had passed his scripts to the book-keeper according to theatre usage, to be turned into prompt copies and dissected into parts and thereafter thrown away; and that of these prompt copies and parts many were too tattered and greasy to be decypherable, and could only be made good by coaxing old actors to recall what they had said and done: briefly, that the texts had been left in such a typically actorish muddle that only actors, with the aid of sundry quartos, could sort them out? In the dedication

which they addressed to the Earls of Pembroke and Montgomery, the actors who shouldered the job acknowledge their shortcomings; in their advertisement to their readers they mention the "unblotted" sheets they received from Shakespeare but do not say expressly that they worked from them, a statement which their manifold errors would have belied. On two points they leave us in no doubt: they are worried about the cost of the enterprise, and they are as thankful as they are proud to have seen it through.

In short, the great virtue of this untidy Folio is that it smells of the theatre. It lets us in through the stage door. In the mad, ardent world where plays are written, and hacked about, and tried this way and that, and finally are mounted and played, there is no such thing as an improbability. And the longer we browse in the pages of the Folio the less improbable it seems that genius should have descended on a young actor and hack dramatist who had already a pretty turn for conceits and sensuous verse, and worked in daily association with the flamboyant personalities of the stage. It is beyond question a monument erected to a theatre man by theatre men.

The private life of a great artist is often disappointingly uneventful. The record of the life that Shakespeare lived outside the playhouse walls is so slight, so lacking in signal incident, that we cannot help trying to piece out its imperfections with our thoughts. For such few incidents as we know of can hardly be said to link him with the great world of his time: they are too nearly on a par with Mr Roger's debt for malt and that misunderstood legacy of the second-best bed. It sorts well with our notion of a gentle poet that he should have penned the lament of Constance for young Arthur with the loss of his own boy in mind, less well that in the same year he should have been sworn to keep the Queen's peace at the instance of one William Wayte, who professed to go in bodily fear of him. The rest of that story (and much else) will be found in Dr Hotson's *Shakespeare versus Shallow*. If the revelation shocked some of us, it was nevertheless invigorating because, to tell the truth, we were beginning to chafe a little at that insistent harping on our poet's gentleness. Secretly we had always welcomed those highly suspect anecdotes which encouraged the belief that he had a bit of devil in him. Certain octogenarians of Stratford obliged Betterton with their reminiscences; they may have lied to please him or for beer, as village octogenarians have been known to do.⁶ But if the lad really was at one time a butcher's apprentice we were glad to learn that he smote his calf, as

Casca was to smite Caesar, in style; that surfeit of Wincote ale was somehow satisfactory, too.

Even scandal was welcome if it helped to rid us of the kind of boy who would grow up in the image of the Stratford bust. Did he seduce Anne, or she him, being eight years his senior? Was it a troth-plight, to make sure that she could conceive, and did her family intervene on learning that the prospective son-in-law had another Anne at Temple Grafton? Or is the Anne Whateley of the Worcester register simply a misspelling of Anne Hathaway? The affair of the deer and his lampooning of "lousy Lucy" may have made Stratford too hot for him, but the authenticity of that tale has been on the wane since we learned that Sir Thomas was most certainly not the original of Master Shallow.⁷ On the other hand he is supposed to have left home when he was twenty-one and the father of three small children: did it come over him that unless he got away now he never would? Here begin what are called the hidden years. Did a visiting company of players lure him away with the promise of freedom and adventure? Or did a patron offer him some small domestic post as a stepping-stone to the world of the arts? Was it, as a recent theory goes, to Rufford Hall that he went, the seat of the Heskeths, and thence, as William Shakeshaft, into the ranks of Lord Strange's Men? Research goes on, and may one day present us with a certainty that will obliterate our cherished picture of a young man setting out over Clopton Bridge with his pack on his back and the world before him.

When he re-emerges, his pen is at work. *Love's Labour's Lost*, Dr Dover Wilson has surmised, was the fruit of a sojourn in the country with Southampton during a summer of plague, when the theatres were closed.⁸ And it is from the moment when Southampton comes into the story that, with the best intentions, we brace ourselves for the perilous task of dramatising a dramatist.

However it is not the plays, but the Sonnets, that first tempt us strongly in this direction. The most pedestrian view, which Sir Sidney Lee was trounced for upholding, is that they were written during a term of years, that they circulated privately in manuscript, and that a certain William Hall secured a copy and passed it to one Thomas Thorpe, stationer and publisher, who rewarded Hall by immortalising him in the dedication as the "onlie begetter". Certainly "begetter" seems an extravagant term in the circumstances. But we are not on much surer ground when we identify Mr W. H. as William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke or, by inverting the letters, as Henry Wriothesley,

Earl of Southampton; and whichever identity we established we should still have to wonder what is meant by "begetter". At all events, is it necessary, however exciting it may be, to conclude from either premise that the Sonnets—whose proper sequence, by the way, has been much debated—record a personal pilgrimage, passing from an infatuate friendship felt by Shakespeare for a man of higher station than his own to that friendship's betrayal through the intervention of a Dark Lady? When the Sonnets were being written everyone was writing sonnets, from accomplished masters of that fascinating new form to fumblers like Benedick; and when one wrote a sonnet one was more concerned with its perfecting than with the occasion that had inspired it. It might have begun as a *cri du coeur*, but it emerged as a polished product, fit to be handed round. Were these particular sonnets, passionate—and polished—as they are, not handed round as is supposed but kept under lock and key until mischance or theft brought them to light? But, even if that is so, do they in fact tell a *tragic* story? Or do they tranquilly enshrine the fleeting crises of a young man's heart? We do not know, and are never likely to know; to the end of time we shall be free to interpret the Sonnets according to our various dispositions. The interpretation suggested here is one of several, and will commend itself mainly to those who see no reason why an uneventful life should be unproductive.⁹

But is it when we turn to the plays that we most need to keep a firm rein on our imagination, and particularly to those great tragedies in which he confronts the naked face of evil. He had perfected his art in terms of a world which, on the whole, he had seemed to find very pleasant, a world fundamentally secure, sane and serene. What, it has been asked, could have impelled him to plunge into the black chaos that encircled it but some momentous convulsion, yet to be discovered, in his own life? Those years were darkened by public events sombre enough to change a nation's mood, and his also; but if the brief golden age had endured it is not likely that that insatiable spirit would have refrained from further adventure; and what adventure was left him, now, but to quest deeper and deeper into the recondite wickedness, and loveliness, of the human heart? He could not be content to leave *Hamlet* as his masterpiece and retire with a speculative shrug; moreover the unparalleled instrument he had fashioned must be used. No personal disaster was needed as a spur—it would be far easier to believe in something of the kind if he had attempted *Lear* and failed. External events, and the men who

shaped them or tried to shape them, certainly left their mark upon these plays. The date of *Lear* has been checked by Edmund's mention of the recent eclipses, and it has been conjectured that Hamlet's vaccillations echo the indecision displayed by Essex in Ireland; between the greater instance and the less there is much more that has been, and may be, ferreted out. So, certainly, had the trial of Shylock owed something to the real trial of Dr Lopez; so, conceivably, had Southampton's set originated the trios of young gentlemen who adorn the earlier comedies; so, as everyone knows, is Rosencrantz's jibe at little eyases a jibe at a rival management. But Shakespeare never imperils his immortality (no, not even in *Love's Labour's Lost*) by relying too much on topical allusions that a later generation may not grasp. Nor does he imperil his head, to say nothing of degrading his quality, by taking sides with any faction; he is temperate even in his compliments to the throne. A poet is not a reporter; his observation is the servant of his muse; he will transmit to us nothing that has not, by passing through his own heart and understanding, become part of himself. The truth is that once a poet is fairly mounted no event this world can offer him is half as exciting as the pursuit of his own quarry. The splendours and miseries of history may, on occasion, have the honour of suggesting to him what that quarry might be; but at other times they must not intrude.

Thus he was at once above his age, "for all time", and of it, susceptible to its modulations as most fine artists are. Of these, actors and playwrights above all need the current, common touch. It was his claim, coming as near self-revelation as the rules of the craft allowed, that actors were the abstract and brief chronicle of the time. The same may be said of the plays. The patient work of scholars now enables us to group them with some degree of certainty, and each group shews a changing face in a changing light as the sun moves westward. He and his age grew up together. He had the good fortune to span the English Renaissance from its youth to the end of its prime, and there is no aspect of it that the plays do not mirror. In *Love's Labour's Lost* we have the modish craze for juggling with words; see how it persists, unwanted, in one of Juliet's great scenes, and at last finds a real use for itself in Richard's graceful maunderings in Westminster Hall. In the central histories the silken dalliance of youth is cast aside and the notes of honour and nationalism are sounded, almost truculently: here is England's defiance of Spain. Now the scourings of an army, old soldiers tramping the roads, minister to the age's delight in human oddity, and in the train of the kings come the

irregulars, outrageous and splendid, not trammelled by Hollinshed and fact. When he wrote the march-off from Agincourt Shakespeare had finished with the hero-king, but the kingly key is maintained. The people of the great comedies are of regal stature; they are like kings and queens at play, sporting th caprices for which we love them in a domain that Henry and Falstaff have jointly won; without further evidence we should place these comedies in the golden years of the reign. A time of faction and conspiracy turns his thoughts to the noble Roman who struck at Caesar; his next high-souled killer is a prince sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought: it is a *fin-de-siècle* characteristic. So is the feminism of Helena and Isabella; so is the anti-militarist satire in *Troilus*. The era of James opened inauspiciously with plague, and meanness and profligacy began to appear at court; there is an acrid tang in *Measure for Measure*. Bitter comedy does the heart no good; better to burn it clean with tragedy—and tragedy, in truth, he gave us. Even in the Indian summer of his retirement he kept a finger on the pulse of the time. Faced with a spiritual progress of such magnitude we need not worry overmuch whether Essex sat for Hamlet, or what unrecorded catastrophe befell Shakespeare in or before 1605. If the Baconians could adduce evidence that in the autumn of that year the Secretary of State was on the verge of a mental breakdown, that *would* be something.

Chapter 10

The Master of the Revels

TO THIS DAY, it is the Lord Chamberlain who requires a London manager to lower and raise his fireproof curtain in the presence of the audience, and it is the Lord Chamberlain whose license must be obtained for any play before it is publicly performed in the United Kingdom.

As the life of the medieval castle centred in the hall, so the life of the Tudor palace centred in the great chamber, which was the ceremonial meeting-place of courtiers and sovereign. Of the three chief officers of Elizabeth's household, two were the Master of the Horse and the Lord Steward; but all matters pertaining to the Queen's state, even to her apparelling and, notably for us, to her entertainment, lay in the ordering of the Lord Chamberlain. Under Elizabeth the post was held successively by Lord Howard of Effingham, the Earl of Sussex, the second Lord Howard, Lord Hunsdon, Lord Cobham and the succeeding Lord Hunsdon, with whom chiefly we shall be concerned, since it was under his protection that the Lord Chamberlain's Men rose to glory. Under James I it was held by the Earls of Suffolk, Somerset and Pembroke, the last being Shakespeare's friend and patron. The Lord Chamberlain of Elizabeth's day presided over a hierarchy of subordinate functionaries, including gentlemen of the chamber, gentlemen ushers, grooms of the chamber, ladies of the bedchamber and privy chamber, and maids of honour; these young ladies were under the immediate surveillance of an elder of their own sex.

The Revels Office, staffed in chief by a Master, a Clerk Comptroller (or head-accountant) and a Clerk, was a sub-department in the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction. In the time of Henry VIII the Master of the Revels was appointed temporarily, on festal occasions, as administrator over the Lord of Misrule, and an official of the royal wardrobe was detailed to assist him. The first permanent appointment as Master was that of Sir Thomas Cawarden in 1545; and he drew up a careful scheme for the listing and safe keeping of costumes and properties, and for the checking of wages and hours of labour. He continued Master until 1559, having lived to arrange the pageants for Elizabeth's coronation. A succession of Masters

followed, until in 1578 the post fell to Edmund Tilney, conceivably through the influence of his kinsman, Lord Howard, himself a former Lord Chamberlain.¹ Tilney's holding of it coincided with the years of apogee, when court entertainments were growing in scale and splendour. In 1583 he was charged with the formation of the Queen's company of players. He survived Elizabeth by seven years, but it seems that under James he delegated his function to his nephew Sir John Buck, to the final mortification of the patient Lyly. In 1610 Buck succeeded; in 1622 his mind gave way and he was replaced by Sir John Astley. Astley traded the post to Sir Henry Herbert, who held it up to the Commonwealth and claimed it again, together with the emoluments appertaining to it, after the restoration.²

The theatre is a great spendthrift: long may it be so; and Elizabeth was economical by necessity to begin with and thereafter by disposition. The Revels Office bills were footed by the Treasury after scrutiny by the Privy Council, and detailed accounts were kept. In 1571-2, not one of the golden years, the expenditure on wages and materials was some fifteen hundred pounds,³ which in terms of to-day's money must be multiplied by more than ten. The accounts and other documents are extant, and have been minutely examined and collated by Professor Feuillerat; and as the Revels department concerned itself with every variety of court show, plays being only one, they afford a rich mine of information for those who delve in it.

Shortly after taking office Cawarden installed himself and his assistants in the former priory of Blackfriars, together with the paraphernalia of the court shows, which when not in use was carefully stored and periodically aired and checked. After his death the office and its equipment were transferred to the late monastery of St John of Jerusalem in Clerkenwell; and here, in a large room, companies commanded to court would polish up their plays under the censoring eye of the Master, even of the Lord Chamberlain himself.

In due course the Master of the Revels became in fact the Censor. It fell to him as part of his duties to "reform" in all plays, whether designed for the court or for the public, any matter offensive to church or crown. Truth to tell, the actor had invited clerical and political restraint from the moment when he lent himself to controversial interludes; and among Elizabeth's earliest proclamations there is one forbidding all such interludes as touched on "matters of religion or the gouernance of the estate of the common weale". Another pro-

vided for the licensing of all printed books by herself, or by six of her Privy Council, or by a panel of churchmen which included the Archbishops of Canterbury and York and the Bishop of London, also for the licensing of all pamphlets, plays and ballads by a sub-committee of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. So much for the security of religion and the realm. It was the Puritans of the City of London who were perpetually raising th *moral* issue; and a further patent conferred on Sir Edmund Tilney in 1581 was at once a sop to them and a safeguard to the actors whom they sought to destroy. For, after authorising Tilney to requisition everything his department needed, from craftsmanship down to canvas, nails and wire, it invested him, as a matter of equal but no greater importance, with full powers as Censor of Plays. Thenceforth all scripts must be submitted, and a reading fee paid. Tilney began by charging five shillings a play. The fee slowly rose to seven, plus a gratuity of two pounds. By Herbert's time the abuse had been extended to a charge on the house receipts, and brought him a large income.

The licensing of players and of the premises in which they performed was a less simple affair. The individual actor was not officially recognised unless he belonged to an accredited company. The company carried as passport the authorisation of their patron; this was not unlike the passports that we know, in that is requested and required that the bearers might play without let or hindrance. The Crown might even back it with a royal license, such as the universal *laisser-passer* which Elizabeth granted Lord Leicester for his men in 1574. Or, when the patron was royal, the company would carry the royal patent, as the Queen's Men did. But in order to play in any particular place, still more to build a playhouse, it was, very Englishly, obligatory to obtain the consent of the local authority. And over all, the Crown itself excepted, was the Privy Council. While the great nobles pressed their servants' claims, and the plague flared up and died down, it was the Privy Council that nursed the players, now compelling, now inhibiting and, in their dealings on the players' behalf, tactfully but firmly suggesting. Puritanism was not yet embattled; the Commonwealth was still two reigns away; and in their felicitous handling of the city and its Lord Mayor the Privy Council blended overt respect with covert derision in a manner consonant with the highest traditions of diplomacy.

Chapter 11

A Place of One's Own

THERE WERE PLAYERS long before there were playhouses; but in the account of the companies which is to follow shortly there must be frequent reference to the theatres in which they played, and it may help the reader if at this point they are briefly enumerated.

Apart from the doubtful cases of a "theatrum" at Exeter in the fourteenth century and a "game-house" at Yarmouth in the sixteenth, it would seem that no building was specially erected for the performance of plays until Elizabeth had been on the throne for eighteen years. Up to that time and, outside London, for some years to come, the place for a play was the public inn-yard or the private hall. We shall find that both imposed their conditions on the public and "private" playhouse respectively and, in the course of time, that both influences joined with that of the Masque in shaping the theatre of the Restoration, from which the theatre of to-day derives.

The first requirements of a playhouse which has to earn its living are that it shall accommodate as many spectators as possible in the closest possible proximity to the stage, and that it shall keep out everyone who tries to see the show without paying. These conditions were not fulfilled by the miracle stage in the market-place, nor by the pageant-cart that moved through the town. But they would be fulfilled if, so to speak, the pageant-cart, canopy and all, were stationed at the side or end of an inn-yard that was surrounded by one or more galleries, and had a wicket in the great doors where money could be taken. And here we have at once the rudiments of the Globe. The figure is by no means fanciful. Staging, with a canopy above it for all we know, was certainly put up in the inn-yards of the city and the neighbouring boroughs, and on that staging the plays were given. When, in 1576, James Burbage erected the first of all the playhouses, he built, as Chambers has concisely said, an inn-yard without an inn.

The inns whose yards are known to have been so converted on occasion were: In Stepney, without the city, the Red Lion; in Bishopsgate Street (number ninety-one), the Bull, where the Queen's Men, Tarleton among them, played their first London season in 1583; in Gracechurch Street the Bell, in

Bell Yard, where they also appeared in the same year, and the Cross Keys, winter quarters of the Lord Chamberlain's Men round about 1594-6;¹ on Ludgate Hill the Bel Savage, where the Queen's Men are believed to have played in 1588, also, presumably, Alleyn and the Admiral's Men, since *Faustus* was seen there.

Certain disadvantages were attached to the inn-yard theatre. The players were not on their own territory, having none as yet; and no doubt the landlord levied what tax he chose on the gate-money for rent. Nor was this the only annoyance. The stage ascendant is such a stirring spectacle that for that very reason we must be careful not to anticipate the glory that was yet to come. But even in the days of *Appius and Virginia* the actor may well have had a strong sense of the dignity of his calling. If he had, he may not have been entirely happy in the thought that his art, like the art of the cabaret, was an adjunct to the commerce of the inn, or that now and then it served as ground-bait for the brothel. Collectively, he and his comrades might swagger under the patronage of as grand a name as any in England; as an individual, these circumstances might remind him painfully of his equivocal position in the social scheme. And always there were the civic authorities, as intolerant of playacting as the 'prentices and less queasy citizens were avid of it, ever on the alert to find cause for suppressing it in some disturbance, some irregularity, when their perennial ally, the plague, was not at hand. We do not know what considerations led James Burbage to his great resolve. His proceeding was altogether practical: he built himself an independent theatre in the Liberties beyond the city walls and the Lord Mayor's jurisdiction.

He was a joiner in a small way, turned actor, who by 1574 had risen high enough in his new profession to head the list of Lord Leicester's Men in the Queen's comprehensive license of that year. He was a little over forty, and two years later his worldly wealth amounted to sixty-six pounds.² But his brother-in-law, John Brayne, was a prosperous grocer, and had been associated financially with the setting-up of a stage at the Red Lion. The inveigling of the reluctant Brayne into Burbage's project with the promise that it would not cost more than two hundred; the discovery that it had cost five—and the building not yet finished; the further assurance that in next to no time the profits would make all well; the interminable grievances, counter-grievances and suits in chancery that followed; the descent in person (after fourteen years of it) of the widowed Mrs. Brayne in pursuit of her rights, and her discomfiture at

the hands of young Richard Burbage, armed with a broom and making his first appearance in history: every incident in the tale will console and sustain persons who take a hand in theatrical speculation. In the upshot it appeared that the venture had cost nearly seven hundred, of which Burbage had contributed fifty together with his own labour, for which he had charged. Of all he had lent, Brayne recovered a hundred and thirty-five pounds and one shilling. But The Theatre proved a success; the only thing in James Burbage's conduct of the affair that one can admire without reserve is his unwavering determination to see it through.

To the Englishman of the day the word for playhouse would have been playhouse. Mantzius conjectures that Burbage called his playhouse The Theatre because he thought the name had a stylish, classical ring.³ It stood on land that had once belonged to the Benedictine priory of St Leonards, north of the Bishops-gate entrance to the city and between Finsbury Fields and what is now Shoreditch High Street. It was spoken of as "in the fields", and we may picture it so, among the scattered farms and dwellings that fringed the city wall. It was built of timber, with three galleries, and according to De Witt was in the form of an amphitheatre; by removing the stage it could be converted into an arena. "Sumptuous" and "gorgeous" were the epithets which its furnishing drew from the distressed puritans. It was opened, as was proper, by Lord Leicester's Men, and thereafter was at various times in the occupation of Lord Oxford's (late Warwick's), the Queen's and Lord Arundel's, and by the Lord Admiral's in conjunction with Lord Strange's: finally it was the home of Lord Chamberlain's Men. Lodge (in *Wit's Miserie*) tells us that in 1596 an early *Hamlet* was played there. Its situation attracted rowdy elements among the populace, and more than once the Middlesex justices had to deal with cases of disorder. In 1597 the production of *The Isle of Dogs* at the Swan called down the wrath of the Privy Council, and all playhouses were closed; The Theatre did not open again.

This was like to have been the end of it; but an odd sequel was in store. Whatever the claims of the Brayne estate, it was Burbage who held the site, on a twenty-one years' lease from a certain Giles Allen. This was renewable in 1586, after ten years' tenure; but the renewal, although proposed by Burbage, was never executed. In 1597 Burbage died and the old lease ran out, while Allen was still hedging about a new one. But a clause in the old lease had empowered the tenant to pull down any buildings he might have set up, and this Richard

and Cuthbert Burbage, the sons of James, proceeded to do. In 1599 they transported the material to the south bank of the Thames, and re-erected it. To the suit of Brayne's inheritors, now lost in the mazes of the law, there succeeded the suit of Giles Allen. But Allen's case failed, and the end of The Theatre was the beginning of the Globe.

The Curtain playhouse in Moorfields was completed in or before 1577, within a few months of the opening of The Theatre, to which it was in close proximity. It was so named because the land on which it stood was known as the Curtene—*curtina* is a small field enclosed by walls. It is not recorded who built it, but one Henry Laneman was tenant of the site. After some years of competition, it seems that the neighbour managements resolved on a kind of merger, for in 1585 Laneman agreed with Burbage to pool the takings of the two houses. The Curtain, like The Theatre, was closed under the ban of 1597, but re-opened and received the Lord Chamberlain's Men, who gave *Romeo and Juliet* there and appear to have remained in occupation until 1599, when the Globe was approaching completion and they moved south to the Swan. Thereafter less is heard of this theatre, but Queen Anne's (formerly Worcester's) Men were there in 1603–6, and the Prince's Men in 1622. It was in use for prize-fights as late as 1627.

Next in order of date was the theatre at Newington Butts, a mile from London Bridge by way of Southwark High Street. There was play-acting at least on this archery ground in 1580, and certainly a playhouse by 1586. The Lord Admiral's and Lord Chamberlain's Men gave a short joint season there in 1594; but it lay too far out for convenience except on holidays. By 1599 it had ceased to exist.

The Rose, so called from the rose-garden on the site of which it stood, was on Bankside, just east of Rose Alley, Southwark. Henslowe, the financial power behind Alleyn and the Admiral's Men, acquired the land in 1585, and by 1588 he had built the theatre. But it does not seem to have been in use until 1592, when we find him repairing and embellishing it; he may not have lost much money by the delay, for he was a shrewd operator in real estate, and had erected tenements on the site as well. From that time the Rose figures constantly in the records, mainly as headquarters of the Admiral's Men, until 1600, when Henslowe and Alleyn built the Fortune and installed them there. It appears to have been of timber and plaster, thatched and with a brick foundation; contemporary picture-maps shew it as octagonal in form. In

1603 Henslowe wrote of it as "the little Rose", which suggests that it was smaller than the Fortune. By 1605 at latest it was out of his hands. Although it is believed to have been pulled down shortly after, there are allusions to a Rose as far on as 1622.

The Swan was also on the south bank of the river, but to the westward of the Rose in Paris Garden, where the bears were kept and baited. It is the subject of the familiar sketch that we associate with the name of De Witt. Round (or many-sided) and of wood, it had a removable stage, as the drawing seems to indicate. Francis Langley built it, in the face of ineffective protests from the Lord Mayor, whose writ did not run on Bankside, and of long-continuing opposition from the Surrey justices. It was opened in or before 1596. Lord Pembroke's Men played here in 1597, and it was here and in the same year that *The Isle of Dogs* scandalised authority and brought a temporary ban on all the theatres. Recently it has been well argued that it was the Swan, not the Curtain, which housed the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1599, while the Globe was still in the builders' hands. The Lady Elizabeth's Men are believed to have played in it in 1611 and for some years after. In its decline it was intermittently used for fencing and acrobatics. A well-known allusion in 1632 to "a dying Swanne" is generally supposed to mark its end.

As related, the Globe—the Glory of the Bank in Jonson's phrase—was erected by the brothers Burbage, who incorporated in it the material of The Theatre which they had summarily removed from under the nose of Giles Allen. It was completed not later than September, 1599, because in that month Thomas Platter, a foreign visitor, noted a performance of *Julius Caesar* there. That it was ready in time for *Henry V* has been generally assumed, but is now questioned. If it was not, the Swan first had the honour of accommodating the vasty fields of France, since it was there that Lord Chamberlain's Men made shift until the Globe could receive them. After much discussion as to the exact site, most authorities are agreed that this is fairly indicated by a tablet set in one of the walls of Messrs Barclay and Perkins's brewery, formerly Thrale's. We know that it was a three-tiered house, almost certainly circular, constructed of timber and roofed with thatch above the tiers and the stage; also that it was surmounted at the rear by a penthouse or tower. Details of the stage are lacking, save that it was forty-three feet wide and

had a normal depth of twenty-seven feet, the extreme depth being nearly forty; but we owe these measurements to their inclusion in the specification for the later Fortune, which in its stage arrangements copied the Globe. Provokingly for us, the builder was the same man, and as to every other detail of the stage the specification reveals nothing, but tells him to do what he did before.

The House outlived its era. Its most glorious decade was the first; thereafter the indoor Blackfriars under the same management slowly began to draw ahead. In 1613 *Henry VIII* was produced at the Globe with full honours, and the story goes that a wad from a discharge of stage artillery set the roof-thatching on fire. At all events the theatre was destroyed, with much loss of property (what scripts were there?) but none of life. It was at once rebuilt, safer and more splendid, and at more than twice the estimated cost; for all this, it is said, the players themselves were able to find the money. They and their successors continued in possession until the Commonwealth. In 1644, when a lease happened to run out, their theatre, already closed, was demolished by Sir Mathew Brand to make room for a housing scheme. More than a century later Mrs. Thrale, the brewer's wife, noted on her husband's business premises "a black heap of rubbish . . . really curious remains of the old Globe playhouse"; her contribution to the debate as to its shape is that it was hexagonal without, but round within.

The Fortune was a joint venture of Alleyn, by now a man of substance, and of Henslowe, whose stepdaughter Alleyn had married in 1592. On Bankside the Globe was a strong competitor, but a new residential quarter was springing up northwest of the city boundary. The site they chose, off Golden Lane in the parish of St Giles Without, lay just beyond Cripplegate, that is to say not in the domain of the Lord Mayor, but of the more placable Justices for Middlesex; like the site of the Rose, it afforded room for profit-yielding tenements. The lease was acquired in 1599 in the name of Alleyn, who later became sole proprietor. The Privy Council's approval of yet another theatre project was won by the intercession of the Lord Admiral himself, and they gave it with a broad hint that it would gratify the Queen's majesty if Alleyn, who had given up acting for some years, came back to the stage, which for a term he duly did.

The partners must have known they were on sure ground, because some months before the lease went through they made

a contract for the building of the Fortune with Peter Street, the carpenter who had built the Globe; as aforesaid it has almost nothing to tell us about the stage of either house. On the other hand we learn that the auditorium of the Fortune was rectangular, not round; that its stage and three tiers were roofed with tiles and not with thatch; and that it was made of timber, coated with plaster and based on a foundation of piles, brick and cement. From the sums which the accounts allocate to painting and gilding, it is evident that the interior of the house presented a spectacle handsome enough to provoke the puritan outcry that followed. The Admiral's Men opened here in 1600, and remained under their subsequent titles until 1621, when the theatre was burnt down. Alleyn, sole proprietor since Henslowe's death in 1616, leased the site to a syndicate who built a new playhouse, circular, and of brick. This was dismantled in 1649; in 1662, at latest, it was no more.

Less is known of the Red Bull in St John Street, Clerkenwell. A reference in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* suggests that it was flourishing in 1606 or thereabouts. It was frequently the home of Queen Anne's Men until about 1617. It became, in nineteenth-century parlance, a drama house, rather a rowdy house into the bargain, cropping up from time to time in the Middlesex charge-sheets, although it was never the actors who were in trouble. After 1619 it passed to various companies in succession and was enlarged and roofed. It was the scene of some surreptitious performances under the Commonwealth, and of a triumphant reunion of the players in the days of the Restoration, only to be superseded by the grand new patent theatres of D'Avenant and Killigrew.

The Hope, on the Surrey side, was a further enterprise of Alleyn and Henslowe. It was completed in 1614, on the site, and partly out of the materials, of the bear-pit in Paris Garden, west of the Globe and the Rose; there is—or was in recent memory—a Bear Gardens Lane running south from the Thames. It may be surprising to learn that England's first great actor, one day to found an English public school, had for seven years sought to be made Master of the Games, the games being bull-baiting and bear-baiting. But so it was; and in 1604 Alleyn and Henslowe became joint Masters, having under them one Meade as Keeper. Eventually this appointment was to feed the partners' unabated passion for acquiring property. The burning of the Globe in 1613 may have given the signal for their next great advance in this field. For two

months after that event there was another builder's contract, with Gilbert Katherens, carpenter, for the demolishing of the bear-pit and the erecting of the Hope. It is as precise as the contract for the Fortune. The Hope was to be modelled on the Swan, round or many-sided; it was to be an all-purpose house, for plays or baitings, with a removable stage; an innovation was that the stage-canopy was to span the auditorium and dispense with view-obstructing pillars. A "bull-house" and stables were adjacent. It was here, in the year of its completion, that the Lady Elizabeth's Men produced *Bartholomew Fair*, and there were differences with Henslowe because he wanted to lay them off for the bear-baiting once a fortnight. Meade, who seems to have been manager in charge at the time, had similar trouble with the Prince's Men a year later. But bear-baiting gained ground until the Commonwealth, when it was suppressed and the bears were shot. The Hope was stripped in 1656, and the Restoration revived the baiting, but not the plays.⁴ It was still standing, dismantled, in 1683.

There remain two somewhat doubtful candidates for inclusion in this list of the public theatres. Porter's Hall, erected by Philip Rosseter in the precincts of Blackfriars in 1615, was suppressed in deference to local objections eighteen months later⁵; it was the scene of certain performances by the Children of the Queen's Revels and of the Lady Elizabeth's and Prince Charles's Men, who were at that time associated with them. There is also the rather puzzling Boar's Head⁶ which, Chambers thinks, was not one of the half-dozen inns of that name but a true playhouse in Whitechapel, outside the city limits, where Lord Derby's Men played in 1599-1601, Lord Worcester's in 1602 and Queen Anne's in 1603-6.

Chapter 12

A Roof of One's Own

"IS THIS A THEATRE?" whispered Smike, when he and Nicholas stood on the stage at Portsmouth; "I thought it was a blaze of light and finery". "Why, so it is", rejoined his friend, "but not by day, Smike—not by day". Are schoolchildren still indocinated with the belief that the Elizabethans, like the Greeks, played by daylight and in the open air because of their innate healthiness of mind? If so, let the child enquire whether to roof the arena of the Fortune, as well as its stage and tiers, with a fifty-five-foot span would not enormously have increased the cost of the building; whether the price of one candle was not something like tenpence in our money; and whether the void through which the free light, and the rain, came down did not serve also to carry off the reek of unwashed—however robust—bodies. Of course our fancy is held by the ever-sunlit Globe of our own conjuring, and it is a disillusionment to learn that when the King's Men played under the candles in their first winter season at Blackfriars they took a thousand pounds more than they were used to take on Bankside.

The private theatres were all indoor theatres. There have been various explanations of the term "private". But the stage has ever been an ingenious eluder of authority, and of all explanations the most probable is that it was coined by a manager who wished to circumvent the Act of Common Council of 1574. This prohibited all plays within the city walls, but exempted from the ban any that were given "in the pryvate hous, dwellinge, or lodginge of anie nobleman, citizen, or gentleman . . . wthowte publike or comen collection of money of the auditorie, or behoulders thereof". A similar provision offers similar opportunities for evasion to-day.

The first private theatre, then, was set up at Blackfriars,¹ the erstwhile priory which had housed the Revels Office for twenty-two years under Cawarden; on his death in 1559 the Office was as we have shewn, transferred to St John's, Clerkenwell. In 1576—it was the year of Burbage's Theatre—there came upon the scene William Farrant, master of the

Children of Windsor Chapel and deputy master, under William Hunnis, of the Children of the Chapel Royal. Farrant took a lease of two floors in the frater or refectory of Blackfriars, housed himself and his family in the lower, and fitted the upper with a stage for the boys of both choir-schools. He called his premises the Private House—not playhouse—in Blackfriars, and professed that the performances given there were in the nature of rehearsals for the Queen's service: it was an excuse sometimes used by the adult companies when in conflict with the perpetual adversary.

He was perhaps more circumspect than he need have been; for in fact the Blackfriars was an enclave within the city and ranked, although not without question, as a "liberty" immune from interference by the Lord Mayor. For centuries the headquarters of the Dominicans (hence *Blackfriars*), it had become, since the dissolution of the monasteries, a convenient residential area for men about court and official persons. The large room which Farrant adapted had served in the past for the King's Parliament; it was here too that Queen Katherine had been tried.

Farrant died in 1580. Hunnis acquired a sub-tenancy from his widow and attempted to carry on; but this was against the terms of the lease, and in 1583 the landlord, Sir William More, intervened. Hunnis countered by transferring his sub-lease to one Henry Evans, a law-writer who, when More continued to press, disposed of it to the Earl of Oxford who had also a troupe of boys. Oxford passed it to his retainer, John Lyly, who at about this time was busy with *Campaspe*; and while this delaying action proceeded a joint troupe of the Children of the Chapel and of Paul's went on playing here, under one or other of the sub-lessees. But three months after *Campaspe* appeared Sir William regained possession; and this was the end of the first Blackfriars, which must not be confused with the illustrious second of that name.

The second Blackfriars was initiated by James Burbage. In 1597, when his lease of The Theatre was running out, he bought from More the same premises which Farrant had leased, with a view to converting them into a regular playhouse. But in the next year he died, and Richard and Cuthbert inherited the project. They had serious obstacles to face. It was not a good moment for theatrical enterprise; within five months of their father's purchase all plays had been put down, and now the residents of Blackfriars were petitioning the Privy Council to forbid the opening of a public theatre in the precincts. Rather oddly, Richard's patron was among the

signatories, but as one of the residents the newly succeeded Lord Hunsdon may have been considering his own peace and quiet. The Privy Council responded to the appeal, and Richard was reluctantly driven to avail himself, as Farrant had done, of the convenient word private.

For the first time there were embodied, under a roof, the essential features of the public playhouse. There were "galleryes", a term which we are free to construe as indicating anything from one tier to three; and that there were three is not incompatible with the height that Burbage had at his disposal. Chambers, in his exhaustive enquiry, suggests that the great parliament room, which had been divided by partitioning and may have been left so in the time of Farrant's little theatre, was now opened up. If so, there was available for stage and auditorium an area of sixty-six feet by forty-six or, according to some authorities, of fifty-two by forty-five. There were windows, but there is evidence that they were darkened for performances of tragedy, possibly of comedy as well; it is certain that artificial light was used.

That however describes the Blackfriars as it was to be. James Burbage had no sooner acquired the property than he died, leaving it to his sons. During the first three years of their tenure no plays are recorded, and it would seem that the reconstruction was at a standstill. Meanwhile they went ahead with the Globe, and in 1600, when the Globe was a going concern, they let the Blackfriars property for twenty-one years to the same Evans who for a brief period had held the lease of the earlier house. The fiction of privacy was maintained; and with the advent of Nathaniel Giles, the new master of the Chapel Children, there began that most brilliant period in the annals of juvenile acting which reached its climax when the children, outplaying their elders, became a menace to the Globe itself. The warning of that craze, and the plagues of 1603-4, dimmed Evan's prospects, and he meditated surrendering his lease. This he finally did in 1608, and was compensated by a share in the syndicate of the King's Men, who at last entered into their inheritance.

Ironically enough, within a year the Blackfriars came under the rule of the City fathers. Yet they took no serious action against the theatre until a decade had elapsed. In 1619 they sought to suppress it; but the King's Men euchred them by obtaining a new patent, which laid even greater emphasis than before on the "privacy" of the establishment. In 1631 a more determined attempt was made, and likewise failed. Not until the dark days of 1642 did the Blackfriars close. Its record is

glorious: it became the foremost playhouse in London, and its contribution to literature may be gauged by the fact that on the title-pages of the great contemporary plays its name appears twice as often as that of the Globe, which by the accession of Charles I it had eclipsed. It was demolished in 1655. Printing House Square marks the site.

The private theatre of Whitefriars was also a conversion. It was originally part of the dispossessed Carmelite priory of that name, just west of Water Lane and between Fleet Street and the Thames. A "liberty" like Blackfriars, it also came within the Lord Mayor's writ in 1608. In that year a portion of the premises, supposedly the refectory, was leased to Michael Drayton and Thomas Woodford, and was used as a playhouse by the Children of the King's Revels and, a year later, of the Queen's Revels, playing jointly with the Lady Elizabeth's Men. Here Jonsons' *Epicene* was given in 1609 and Nat Field's *Woman is a Weathercock* in 1613. After that date the records tell us little except that it continued for another two years to function as a rehearsal-room for the Revels Children. It was in occupation—for a time, it is thought, by the Prince's Men—until 1621; thereafter we have no certain knowledge of it.²

The Salisbury Court, adjacent to the Whitefriars and in the neighbourhood of the present Salisbury Square, was built in 1629 and included, it is said, an actors' hostel. It housed successively the Children of the King's Revels, Prince Charles's Men and the Queen's Men, who were in possession in 1642. After the closing of the theatres it shared with the Red Bull the honour of keeping the sacred lamp alight, however dimly, and suffered at the hands of Cromwell's soldiery. Refurbished at the Restoration, it was of service to D'Avenant and Killigrew before they were installed in their new houses. It was destroyed in the Great Fire.

The Cockpit, or Phoenix, off Drury Lane—it must not be confused with the cockpit in Whitehall where command performances were given on occasion—was in fact a cockpit, built as such in 1609 by one John Best. In 1616 Christopher Beeston, sometime of Worcester's Men, roofed it over and adapted it as a playhouse; next year it was wrecked and set on fire by a mob of riotous 'prentices. At once restored, it was thereafter known by the alternative name of the Phoenix. Under Beeston it housed successively Queen Anne's Men, the Prince's Men, Lady Elizabeth's Men and, from 1625 to 1636, Queen Henrietta's Men, with Shirley as playwright in chief. These were brilliant years, and Beeston rose high in King

Charles's favour; his own young company, whom he styled Beeston's Boys, came under their majesties' patronage, and it has even been speculated whether, if he had not died in 1639, the Cockpit might have become the first Theatre Royal. Such hopes were blasted by his son, who within a year of his succession mounted an unlicensed play that offended the King. In 1640 young William D'Avenant was given command, receiving from his sovereign the patent which, twenty years later, was to prove the foundation of his fortune. Like the other playhouses, the Cockpit was forced to close in 1642. Toward the end of the Protectorate it had the honour of staging a couple of the "operas" which D'Avenant induced the authorities to permit; at the Restoration it passed into a decline.

Whatever we believe, or would believe, about the actor of those days, there is no evidence that he accounted it particularly meritorious to play under the open sky, or that in his choice of where he played he was concerned with anything but the making of his own magic. In this cursory sketch of the Elizabethan and Jacobean playhouses the Globe holds its due place; but rather more attention has been paid to the Theatre and the Blackfriars. In one way they are indeed more significant. The Theatre marks the actor's resolve to have a home, the Blackfriars his resolve to have a roof over his head; and on that conception follow others: a choicer audience, that does not smell unduly and that he can win without assaulting its nerves and ribs, a private world made safe for his make-believe, and the twinkling of candles, recalling immemorial torches that still flicker round a wine-drenched altar, in the background of his dreams.

Chapter 13

Little Eyases

NOW WE HAVE to consider the companies, and had better begin with the companies of boys. For these were in the ascendant until somewhere about 1576, when the adult professional actor began to exchange his precarious tenancy of the inn-yard for the security of a permanent playhouse. Up to that time the boy companies, with their settled quarters and their scholastic-ecclesiastical environment, were for the courtly or fastidious taste the foremost exponents of any drama that pretended to quality and style. But as the grown-up companies made headway towards, and with, the charmed circle of the court, casting also their spell on the officially hostile city, it was natural that they should seek to impart a certain tone to their performances by calling to their aid, as we have seen that they did, writers who were also scholars. We have also seen how writers and actors alike benefited through this co-operation, which with the advent of Marlowe led to the writing and playing of an heroic drama that appealed equally to the penny knave and to the discerning man of means who paid his shilling. And well before *Tamburlaine* the documents of the Revels Office begin to reflect a notable change. In the decade ending in 1576 there were some thirty-five court performances given by boys and twenty-five by men;¹ in the decade beginning in 1576 the boys gave at most twenty-five and the men approximately fifty. While Alleyn, of the Lord Admiral's Men, was spouting the decasyllabics of the Scythian shepherd, the Children of Paul's were frisking quaintly in the twilight of *Endymion*.

Sadly enough, it was the author of *Endymion*, to whose fantasy the Children surely owed as much as he owed to them, who was the instrument of their undoing in the following year. At the prompting of authority Lyly debased them, and his own pen, to the uses of religious-political controversy. Authority, not for the first time nor the last, disowned its tools when they had served its purpose; as a dramatic organisation the Children of Paul's were suppressed, and between 1590 and 1599 there is no record of a performance by them. When, ten years later, they were suffered to emerge from their retirement, the child companies became the rage. A new play-

going generation found them a delightful novelty; hardly less novel and delightful were the amenities of the private theatre in which they played. For a brief spell the boy actors were redoubtable competitors even of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, an eyrie of little hawks whose swoop on the favour of the moment had driven Hamlet's friends to take to the road. Moreover the impish talent that Lyly had fostered, used and abused was now at the disposal of certain rancorous poets who set themselves to mock the established drama and each other; there was "much throwing about of brains", insult was gaily heaped on injury, and the children drew the town. But we must glance at the boy companies in detail.

The Children of Paul's trace their descent from the song-school and grammar-school which were attached to St Paul's cathedral as early as the twelfth century. The boys of both establishments figured in church ceremonies; they assisted no doubt on such quasi-dramatic occasions as the enthronement of the boy-bishop; with the coming of the Miracles the transition to true play-acting became easy. In the fourteenth century they are believed to have made acquaintance with religious drama, and early in the sixteenth under Ritwise, master of the grammar-school, they were performing interludes at court; in 1528 they played the political interlude of *Religion, Peace and Justice* before Wolsey. Ten years later under Redford (the Redford of *Wit and Science*, who was then master of the song-school) they gave an interlude of John Heywood before Princess Mary, and it is likely that Heywood furnished them with many such, for they were playing another at court in the year of Mary's accession. In 1557 Redford was succeeded by his friend Sebastian Westcott. Both Westcott and Heywood were Catholics, and when the Protestant Elizabeth came to the throne Heywood went into voluntary exile; but Westcott, through the intervention of the Queen herself, was allowed to retain his office until his death in 1582.

For the Paul's Children this was an auspicious time, notwithstanding the steady rise of the adult companies. Beginning with an appearance before Elizabeth at Nonsuch in 1559, they gave a seldom broken succession of Christmas performances at court. Within two years of Westcott's death they were uniting with the Children of the Chapel and a boy company under the patronage of Lord Oxford in Lyly's *Campaspe* at the Blackfrairs, which they repeated before the Queen on New Year's Day, 1584. Under Thomas Giles, the new head of the song-school, the association with Lyly was

continued until *Endymion* in 1588. It was in the next year that the Children made their unfortunate excursion into anti-Marprelate propaganda, and 1590 saw an end of their dramatic activities. They were still regretted, according to Thomas Nashe, in 1596; and four years later, with one Pearce as their head and such lively young writers at their disposal as Middleton, Marston and Dekker, they were in full swing again at the Blackfriars, reappearing at court in 1601. With the waning of their vogue the Children begin to fade from the records; their last appearance at court under their own name was in 1606. In 1608, as has been related, the sub-lease under which they held the Blackfriars was cancelled, and Burbage and the King's Men moved in.

The Children of the Chapel Royal derived, like the Paul's Children, from a choir-school, set up in the reign of Henry IV. In the time of Henry VII the establishment consisted of the Dean, Sub-Dean, Gentlemen of the Chapel and Children, the Master of the Children ranking next to the Sub-Dean and drawing on the Exchequer for fees and maintenance. The Gentlemen were playing court interlude early in the sixteenth century; from 1517 the Children, under the enterprising and accomplished William Cornish, were being trained as a court troupe whose quality claimed Elizabeth's consideration when she acceded. In 1561 she commissioned Richard Edwardes, who was then their chief, to recruit promising youngsters from choirs throughout the realm. The Chapel Children were seen at court—possibly in Edwardes's *Damon and Pythias*—in 1564. Under William Hunnis, who succeeded Edwardes in 1566, their court performances were not many; but they are believed to have taken part in Leicester's *Princely Pleasures* at Kenilworth in 1575, and there is some acid Puritan testimony that before that date they were appearing publicly for gain.

This was certainly the fact in 1576, when Farrant, their deputy-Master, installed them at the first Blackfriars. Their ostensibly private performances here culminated in the *Campaspe* of 1583, in which they collaborated with the Children of Paul's and the youthful company of Lord Oxford. Next year the Blackfriars tenancy ended, and although they played intermittently elsewhere the court records make no further mention of them until 1601. By then, as we know, Nathaniel Giles, their new Master, had reinstated them on the same premises but in the second theatre of the name, and their most prosperous era was beginning. Jonson delighted in them, and gave them *Cynthia's Revels*; their youth and sauciness added a barb to his satire, and in *The Poetaster* he and they

plunged into the war of the theatres and "berattled the common stages" to the children's great glory and advantage. It is not so easy to picture them in *Epicene*, still less in Marston's sour and sombre *Malcontent*.

On Elizabeth's death the Chapel children were appointed Children of the Queen's (Anne of Denmark's) Revels, under the mastership of Edward Kirkham, and as such played regularly at court. Hubris seems to have come upon them with success, for in more than one play they affronted the King's majesty, and some of them were put under lock and key; it may have been for this reason that the use of the royal name was temporarily denied them, and they became plain Children of the Revels. But they retained their proud title as Children of Blackfriars; and when they were ousted from that theatre by the Kings' Men they found new quarters at Whitefriars and renamed themselves accordingly. In 1669-10 they were again seen at court, and were again licensed to style themselves as of the Queen's Revels. For three years they toured and gave court shows; from 1613 to 1616 we find them in association with the Lady Elizabeth's Men, and in 1615, on the expiry of the Whitefriars lease, they were established for a brief space at Porter's Hall. A year later their story fades out in the provinces.

The Children of Windsor, deriving from the choristers of St George's Chapel under Edward III, had an early history similar to that of the Paul's and Chapel children. Farrant, their master during Elizabeth's reign, brought them periodically to court from 1567 onward. Ten years later, when he was newly housed at the first Blackfriars, he presented before the Queen a *Mutius Scaevola* in which they appeared jointly with the Children of the Chapel, of whom he was also second-in-command. From now on the Windsor boys were presumably absorbed by the Chapel troupe, for they gave no more court performances under their own name, although Farrant did not relinquish his Windsor post.

The Westminster Boys figure in the court accounts during the earlier years of Elizabeth's reign. They were descended from the Abbey choir and the grammar school, now known as Westminster, of which Nicholas Udall was at one time headmaster; it was however for Eton that he is believed to have written *Ralph Roister Doister*. They were playing in Latin in the first half of the sixteenth century; under their master, John Taylor, they appeared in a Lord Mayor's pageant in 1561; in 1564 they gave the *Heautontimorumenos* and the *Miles Gloriosus* before the Queen. There were no more

court plays for them after 1574, but the boys kept up their acting until the eve of the Commonwealth, and the Westminster Play is still an annual event—perhaps the nearest thing we can now see to a school performance in Renaissance England.

Until recently it was believed that the Children of the King's Revels were no other than the Children of Paul's, who as a dramatic association were passing out of the picture when the King's Revels came into being. It is known that they were a purely commercial organization, founded—perhaps with an eye to easy money, since the boys were on an apprenticeship footing—by the actor Martin Slater, an old Admiral's Man, and the playwright Michael Drayton. They were playing by 1607, and were at Whitefriars in 1608 when the syndicate broke up; a disappointed shareholder brought a lawsuit in which the pleadings are our principle source of information. The company was accorded its name on the title-pages of its plays when they were printed; but no royal patent has come to light. Such a patent however was held during 1615–16 by a later King's Revels troupe which toured the provinces and, after the withdrawal of its licence in the next year, may have merged with the stragglers of the Queen's Revels, once the Chapel Children.

Beeston's Boys, noted a few pages back, were equally without official standing until in 1637 Charles was pleased to dub them the King and Queen's Young Company. Beeston of the Cockpit was reputed hard and unscrupulous in his dealings with actors, but he was a good teacher; himself an old Worcester's man, he was well versed in stage tradition. His son William kept up the training in the years when playing was forbidden, and at the Restoration a few surviving Boys were able to hand that tradition on.

To end the catalogue: The Eton Boys observed the ceremonial of the Boy Bishop until the Reformation made an end of it; they were busy with Christmas plays in the early fifteen-hundreds, under Udall before he went to Westminster, and they made their sole appearance at court in 1573. The Merchant Taylors' Boys, during the headmastership of Richard Mulcaster, played before the Queen in 1573–6 and 1583. In addition to the Earl of Oxford's Boys there was a child company under the patronage of the Earl of Leicester; and "Mr. Standley's Boys" in the court record for 1586 were doubtless associated with some member of the house of Derby.

Theatrical historians can no longer dismiss the child actors

as odd little people who for some months were a source of apprehension at the Globe. Chambers, with characteristic thoroughness, has now made it clear how considerable a part they played in the stage life of their time. But even in his lucid marshalling of facts and dates we may be perplexed, now and then, by some merger, or loss of identity, or change of name. It may save us some confusion if we remember, first, that the chief function of a choir was to officiate at the services; the Children of the Chapel were a dramatic company drawn from the Chapel choir, they were not the whole choir. Secondly, when we read that three companies united in, say, the production of *Campaspe*, this may mean no more than that the best players of each united, becoming collectively Children of Blackfriars. Thirdly, if for example the Windsor Children were in fact absorbed in the Chapel Children, that may mean no more than that certain players were transferred. And as the boy companies declined, and grew up, fleeting alliances with each other, and with their elders, offered the best hope of carrying on.

For a further problem is, how old were these children? Are we to take the word literally? It is known that in the royal choirs provision was made of jobs for boys after their voices had cracked; are we to believe that the cracking of a voice meant the end of a child player? When a squeaking Cleopatra began to develop an uncertain baritone, was he dismissed forever from the boards, or was he welcomed back when his new voice had found itself? Interludes like *Jacke Juggler* and *Thersites*, even full-length works like *Ralph Roister Doister*, we can imagine amusingly played by boys; we can see boy actors helping in the *Dream*, and certainly the Windsor children in the *Merry Wives*. Hothouse-trained brats might make a graceful show in *The Arraignment of Paris* or *Sapho and Phao*, and *Endymion* with a very young cast might be the prettiest thing imaginable. But Ben Jonson is another matter. Making every allowance for the charm of precocity, can we believe that the whole of *The Poetaster* and *Epicene* was spoken in a childish treble? Jonson himself would have us think so when he bewails the death of little Salathiel Pavy, a Child of the Chapel; for Pavy was thirteen, having been for three years "the stage's jewel", and it seems that he excelled in the impersonation of old men. Fortunately for our guessing, the children's theatre passed on to the adult theatre some names that were to become celebrated. The Chapel Children contributed Ostler, Underwood and Nat Field, later of the King's Men. Field was thirteen when he played in *Cynthia's*

Revels, at fourteen he was in *The Poetaster*; but when he took a leading part in *Epicene* he was of age. And a year after *The Poetaster* it was reported that the Dowager Countess of Leicester had so far forgotten her dignity as to marry "one of the playing boyes of the chappell". That many of them were of tender years was no doubt part of the Children's attraction. But we must not forget that every year each of them was a year older; we must not picture all of them as diminutive and angel-faced monkeys, going up the aisle two by two.²

Chapter 14

Copper-Lace Gentlemen

THE READER WHO has dutifully followed the foregoing recital must now brace himself to follow a still longer one, which will endeavour to summarise for his benefit a great deal of material amassed by Sir Edmund Chambers. Like its predecessor, it might perhaps have been relegated to an appendix at the end of this book, were the general reader given to studying appendices, which he is not. The principal reason why he should not skip it is that in its rather involved course there will emerge certain incidents, names, plays and dates that are material to the story.

Acting, one may say, became an established profession in England with the setting-up of officially recognised companies under patronage. It was more firmly established as such by that misconstrued "rogues and vagabonds" edict of 1572, which required that the patron should be of no lower degree than a baron's.¹ This naturally promoted a concentration of talent in a few privileged troupes, who wore the badges and carried the credentials of their noble masters. It was not enacted however that the patron must subsidise his company. Some gratuity would be forthcoming when the company played for the entertainment of himself and his guests, but for their living they were dependent on the pence of the public and on any rewards they might receive for private performances, for whomsoever given. The careful Elizabeth paid ten pounds a show, and James, although prodigal in masques, observed the precedent. Within the frame of the patronage system the players were free agents in the sharing and expenditure of monies received, just as, subject to censorship, licensing restrictions and local prejudice, they were free agents in matters of artistic policy.

Having already noted the company of Richard of Gloucester, we can begin with the records of the Royal Interluders, which go back to the reign of Henry VII and continue down to the middle years of Elizabeth. The Interluders were on the payroll of the Exchequer and wore the royal livery; they played their part as required in the court revels and at times toured extensively for their own profit. From entries in accounts of

the fees paid them we learn that normally they were eight in number: adequate for interludes but hardly more than that. Early in the last quarter of the sixteenth century they were moribund, no longer able to compete with the five-act play and the larger and more purposeful fraternities that were playing it. For this reason they rank only as forerunners of the great companies now to be considered.

The Earl of Oxford's Men were in existence as early as 1492. In 1547 the servants of the sixteenth Earl were in trouble for playing in Southwark while a dirge was being sung for the defunct Henry VIII, and thenceforward are heard of only in the provinces until 1603. Edward de Vere, the seventeenth Earl, is known to have been a writer of comedies, none of them extant (a fact the Oxfordian heretics have no difficulty in explaining), and was undoubtedly theatre-minded. In 1580 he assumed the patronage of the Earl of Warwick's Men, and this troupe were concerned in disorders at The Theatre in the same year; three years of touring followed. In 1584 a company bearing Oxford's name appeared at court with John Lyly, then in his service, as recipient of the fees; but this was clearly his company of boys, playing in conjunction with the Children of Paul's and of the Chapel. The adult company continued on the road, but in 1602 was merged in the Earl of Worcester's Men, and with them played at the Boar's Head. After the death of Elizabeth in the following year the joint company came under the patronage of Anne of Denmark, consort of James I.

The Earl of Derby's Men, first heard of under the third Earl in the reign of Henry VIII, are equally well known as Lord Strange's, since under Henry, Ferdinando and William Stanley, fourth, fifth and sixth Earls, it was sometimes the practice of the heir to maintain, using his courtesy title of Lord Strange, a second company during his father's lifetime. Henry Lord Strange had such a troupe on the road in 1563-70, and another on his succession in 1574; they were seen at court in the three winters of 1580-82. Meanwhile a second company under Ferdinando Lord Strange, which included acrobats, was touring from 1576 onwards, and playing at court in 1580-83. In 1589 they, together with the Admiral's Men, were banned from the City by the Lord Mayor. For the next five years they were in frequent association with the Admiral's using either name or both; but Alleyn, whose talent was the chief attraction, retained his status as the Admiral's servant. This joint company was at its zenith in 1592, when it played no less

than six nights at court, and eighteen weeks with Henslowe at the Rose. There is a supposition that the young Shakespeare was of their number in this year, because the plays included *Henry VI* 1. But the bill was planned to make the most of Alleyn, for in it also were *The Spanish Tragedy*, with his great part of Heironimo, *The Jew of Malta*, in which he was the Barabas, *Orlando Furioso* and *Friar Bacon*. Plague intervened that summer, and again after one month's season in January, 1593. From a licence to tour issued by the Privy Council the following May we learn that in association with Alleyn were Will Kemp the comedian, John Heminge, Thomas Pope, Augustine Phillips and George Brian. In September Ferdinando Lord Strange succeeded to the earldom, and Lord Strange's Men became accordingly Lord Derby's Men. Within six months he was dead, and the theatre world was in confusion owing to the persistence of the plague and the continued closure of the playhouses. The partnership broke up, and Alleyn formed a new body under the style of the Admiral's Men. Pope, Heminge, Phillips and Kemp sought the patronage of Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain, and were playing in town that winter as the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the names of Shakespeare and Burbage being prominent among them. Lord Derby's Men also reformed, for a fresh company under his patronage was playing in the provinces from 1594 onwards, and at court in 1599-1601. The last record is of a performance at Islington in 1618.

The Earl of Worcester's Men, first heard of in 1555 and continuously between 1563 and 1585, confined their early activities to the country. The fact that in 1583 the youthful Edward Alleyn was one of them has suggested the theory that in 1585, when they apparently ceased to exist, they were merged in the Admiral's Men, among whom Alleyn was the outstanding figure. If that is so, a new troupe came into being under the fourth Earl in 1589, and in 1602 appeared at court. They were now in the ascendant, for in this year they absorbed Oxford's Men, playing with them at the Boar's Head; and not many months later they were with Henslowe at the Rose, having Lowin, Kemp, Christopher Beeston and Thomas Heywood among their number and Heywood's *A Woman Killed With Kindness* as the most noteworthy of their plays. On Elizabeth's death they passed under the patronage of Queen Anne, and were given royal liveries. In 1604 they were at the Curtain, in 1607 at the Red Bull, where they seem to have remained, with Heywood still writing for them—Web-

ster's *White Devil* (1612) was also their play—until 1617. In the thirteen years from their entering the Queen's service they registered fewer than twenty performances at court. They toured, but it is believed that they were sometimes represented in the provinces by offshoot companies bearing their name; one such was certainly suppressed by the Lord Chamberlain in 1617. In this year the authentic Queen's Servants moved to the new Cockpit (or Phoenix) under Beeston's management, but revisited the Red Bull on occasion. In 1619 their royal patroness died, and they paid their respects at her funeral. Money quarrels and lawsuits hastened their subsequent disintegration. For many years they had owed much to the financial aptitude of Beeston, and still more to the invention of Heywood, who wrote and adapted for them tirelessly.

The Earl of Leicester's Men began as the players of Lord Robert Dudley not later than 1559, and assumed the name by which they are best known on his ennoblement in 1564. They toured far and wide, played at court in the winters of 1560 and 1562, obtained a licence to play in London in 1571 and were at court until 1574; in that year also they were fortified against Puritan opposition in the city when Leicester obtained from the Queen the unique warrant which permitted him to present them anywhere in London or the realm. James Burbage, father of Richard, was then their leader, and in two years' time was to instal them in permanent headquarters at the first of the London playhouses. Meanwhile there were further inn-yard performances and further tours; we may imagine that they appeared in the *Princely Pleasures* which Leicester devised for his sovereign at Kenilworth in 1575. Established next year at The Theatre, they continued to travel in off-seasons and when the plague raged in town, and were frequently seen at court. Some of them at least, including—this is from a letter of Sir Philip Sidney—"Will [Kemp], my Lord of Lester's jesting plaier", attended their patron in the Netherlands in 1586, and on his recommendations played for Frederick II of Denmark. Their story ends with their appearance at Ipswich in 1587; it was on the day of Lord Leicester's death.

The Men of the Earl of Sussex were established in 1569; they preserved their identity, under three holders of the title, until 1593. Ten years later the name was revived, and endured until 1618. Under the third Earl, he being then Lord Chamberlain, they figured regularly in the royal Christmas revels from 1573 to 1583; during these years of favour it

would seem that they played principally in London. In 1583 Sussex died, and the new company of Queen Elizabeth's Men supplanted them; and under the fourth Earl they took to the road. In 1592 they were again in the capital. In the winter of 1593, the plague of that year having abated, they gave a short season with Henslowe at the Rose; the fifth Earl was now their patron. In 1594 they played for a week jointly with Queen Elizabeth's Men, and it is thought that in the upheaval ensuing from two years of plague they sacrificed their name and amalgamated with them; they reappear under that name in 1602 and after, but not in London. The fact that the third Earl of Sussex was for some years Lord Chamberlain must not lead us into any confusing of them with the more famous Lord Chamberlain's Men. For all that, some memorable plays passed through their hands. *Titus Andronicus* was one, possibly after Shakespeare's handling of it. Others were *The contention of York and Lancaster*, *King Leir and His Three Daughters* and *George a Greene*.

As to the Lord Admiral's Men in their most flourishing period a great deal has been learnt since the discovery, at Dulwich, of the papers left by Alleyn, which include his partner Henslowe's celebrated "diary". That however sheds no light on the company's early history.

Lord Howard of Effingham became deputy Lord Chamberlain, under the third Earl of Sussex, in 1574. At Christmas, 1576-8, his players, styled Lord Howard's Men, made appearances at court; they also were seen in town. As Lord Admiral he had still a company, who in 1585 were acting in association with the then Lord Chamberlain's (Lord Hunsdon's) Men in the country, and at court in the next year. In or about 1587 the Lord Admiral's Men made theatrical history by producing *Tamburlaine* with Alleyn in the title-part. Shortly afterwards a fatal accident with fire-arms on the stage put them temporarily under displeasure, but they were at court again in 1588-9. In the latter year they and Lord Strange's Men were suppressed within the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor; it is conjectured that they had involved themselves in the Marprelate controversy, which was then at its height. In 1590-1 they were at The Theatre, outside the unfriendly City, with James Burbage; and from the Revels accounts it would seem that in court shows at any rate they were already collaborating with Strange's Men. It is likely that in this partnership Alleyn, of the Admiral's, was as actor and man of business the dominant power. When in 1594 it dis-

solved, it was Alleyn who let Kemp, Phillips and the rest (Shakespeare possibly among them) pass to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, and who formed a virtually new organisation.

Now it is that we begin to draw on Henslowe. He was a dyer turned pawnbroker, usurer and eventually theatre-owner, who brought his peculiar abilities into the unthrifty world of stage finance and, unlike some, prospered greatly. His so-called diary is really a cash-book, recording expenditure on play-scripts, wardrobe, properties and so forth, and also the private loans by which he may or may not (the general verdict is that he did) have bound to his service certain improvident artists whom he regarded as a good investment. However that may be, his soundest investment of all was in Alleyn, a most provident artist whom (in 1592) he had bound to himself by bestowing on him the hand of his stepdaughter, Joan Woodward. One consequence of the alliance was an accretion of wealth that at last enabled Alleyn to found and endow a famous public school. Another is that the diary came into Alleyn's keeping and was by him left to posterity; we have learned from it much that we might not otherwise have known of the economics and general conduct of the Elizabethan theatre.

The re-formed Admiral's Men prospered greatly. By June, 1594, they were installed at Henslowe's house, the Rose. During the period 1594-7 Chambers estimates one hundred and twenty-six playing weeks in London alone, and seven performances at court. Of the repertory fifty-five plays are marked by Henslowe as new, although sometimes this may indicate no more than a new acquisition. There is a *Henry V* which is thought to have been *The Famous Victories* or perhaps a doctored version of it, and a *Jeronimo* which is undoubtedly *The Spanish Tragedy*; the greater number of them are extinct. Among the revivals were Marlowe's *Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, *The Massacre at Paris* and the second part of *Tamburlaine*: all with great parts for Alleyn. Other names in the company were John Singer, Richard Jones, Thomas Towne, Martin Slater, Edward Juby, Thomas Downton and James Donstone. In 1597 it was augmented by the secession from Pembroke's Men, then at the Swan, of Robert Shaw, Gabriel Spencer and William Bird. But in this year Alleyn withdrew from the stage for three years; it is believed that his parts were shared by Downton and Shaw. Apart from this deprivation there was little change before 1600, except that in 1598 Spencer met his death in a duel with Ben Jonson.

The record for the three years from 1597 shews a hundred

and fifteen playing weeks in London. The diary no longer notes performances day by day, but still has much to tell. In 1598 there is a memorandum of contract with Thomas Heywood, Anthony Munday signing as witness. Fifty-eight new scripts were purchased, among them the two Robin Hood plays of Munday (Chettle was his collaborator), Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, here called *The Gentle Craft*, and the variously-ascribed *Sir John Oldcastle*. Of the older plays *Faustus*, *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta* maintained their hold on the public.

In 1600 they migrated to Alleyn's and Henslowe's new-built house, the Fortune, and Alleyn himself came back to the stage in obedience to the Queen's wish. The next three years were still prosperous, although the tale of new plays drops to thirty-one. We may assume that old successes were revived—indeed we have seen that Jonson was engaged to write new coloratura effects into *Heironimo*, and there were some additions made to *Faustus*. There were seven court performances in these years. But in 1603 the Queen's death and a recurrence of the plague sent the Admiral's Men out of town, with Downton as lead. Under the patronage of the Prince of Wales they now became Prince Henry's Men, and were duly liveried for the coronation procession of James, who summoned them to court some forty times between 1604 and 1611. But Alleyn's name is omitted from the royal patent of 1606, and this indicates that by that year he had withdrawn as player, while retaining his share in the company; it will be remembered that in 1604 he had become Master of the Games. On the lamented death of Prince Henry in 1612 the company came under the protection of the Elector Palatine, playing as Palsgrave's (or the Palatine's) Men with Downton as their chief. Evil befell them in 1621, when the Fortune was burnt to the ground. With Alleyn's help they survived the loss of their theatre and all their belongings, and a new house was built. But luck was no longer with them. In 1625, a year of plague and royal demise, the name of Palsgrave's Men appears for the last time in the record—although as we shall see the troupe was revived, under the title of Prince Charles's Men, some six years later.²

The company of Queen Elizabeth's Men was founded by royal command in 1583, when Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels, was sent about the country "to choose out a company of plaiers for her maiestie". Up to that year, according to Stowe, the Queen had no players; from which statement we

may assume that the Royal Interluders were no more when she came to the throne. It is probable that existing companies, and certain that Lord Leicester's, were combed to form the new group. The actors were enrolled and liveried as grooms of Her Majesty's chamber; by midsummer they were on the road, no doubt in order that they might be schooled for their appearance in London that winter, and before Elizabeth at Christmas. Despite their royal patronage they were as dependant as any other band of players on the good-will of the City for the right to play there—and in seasons unfit for travelling this was essential if they were to keep their quality up to court pitch; there were embroilments, calling sometimes for discreet intervention on the part of the Privy Council. Beyond the walls, the company were often at The Theatre. With Robert Wilson as leading man and Richard Tarleton as comedian, they enjoyed a five years' supremacy, until in 1587 Alleyn and the Admiral's Men, with Marlowe's pen at their disposal, began to outshine them. The next year saw the death of Tarleton, in whom the Queen particularly delighted. Thereafter there were fewer commands to play at court; in the winter of 1592 there was only one. The plague of 1593 was disastrous for the stage; in 1594, after a last appearance at Whitehall, the company were in low water, sold many of their scripts and took to the road. For nine years their fortunes dwindled; Elizabeth's death dissolved the shadow of their title.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men, on whom Burbage, Shakespeare and Jonson were to shed their lustre, had forerunners of the same name: we have noted that during the chamberlainship of their patron the Men of the Earl of Sussex were entitled to call themselves so. Henry Lord Hunsdon, a nephew of Anne Boleyn, had maintained players since 1564 when, being deputy Chamberlain under Sussex, he brought his troupe to court. This was in 1582; and two years later James Burbage, in some pother with the authorities, claimed Hunsdon's—not Leicester's—patronage. In 1585 Hunsdon became Lord Chamberlain, and styled his Men accordingly; next year they appeared at Whitehall under their new name, having toured with the Admiral's Men. But this alliance seems to have been short-lived, and thereafter the record of the Lord Chamberlain's Men becomes obscure. Yet even if the company disintegrated two connecting links remains between the old and the new: the patron himself and James Burbage.

The Lord Chamberlain's Men whom we particularly honour established their identity in 1594, when they emerged from

the chaos to which the plague had reduced the theatre. We have seen that from about 1590 the Admiral's Men had been working in conjunction with Lord Strange's Men, later known as Lord Derby's—Shakespeare, as some suppose, being among the latter; also that in 1594 there was a split, Pope, Heminge, Phillips and Kemp seeking the patronage of the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Hunsdon. If Shakespeare was not associated with the seceders at that time, he soon was to be. A company calling themselves the Lord Chamberlain's Men were shortly seeking a licence to play at the Cross Keys; that winter they were installed at The Theatre, and Shakespeare, Kemp and young Burbage jointly received the fees for certain court performances—conjecturably of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Romeo and Juliet*. *The Comedy of Errors* was presented to a rather rowdy audience at Gray's Inn.

It is noteworthy how many plays already stood to Shakespeare's credit—as his or in part his—at this stabilising moment of his career: *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the three parts of *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *King John* and *Titus Andronicus*. Now begins the succession of resounding names. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—let no producer forget that it is an epithalamium—is thought to have been occasioned by the nuptials of Lord Derby and Lady Elizabeth Vere in 1595, or of Lord Hunsdon's grand-daughter and the son of Lord Berkeley in 1596. Chambers assigns *The Merchant of Venice* to the later year, and guesses at an early *Hamlet*. It was in 1596 too that the company lost their patron and passed into the care of his son; but it was only for a few months that they were constrained to revert to their earlier title of Lord Hunsdon's Men. After the brief interregnum of Lord Cobham the new peer assumed his fathers' post, and from 1597 to the Queen's death they continued as the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

They went on tour in the summer of 1596; the next year saw the two parts of *Henry IV* and, as recent research has convinced us,³ *The Merry Wives*; but also there was the affair of *The Isle of Dogs* at the Swan, and the consequent banning of plays sent them on the road again. In 1598 The Theatre had closed its doors for ever; and there is now good testimony that the Lord Chamberlain's Men, after a sojourn at the Curtain, crossed the river and settled at the Swan. If so, it was at one or other of these houses that they played the intriguing *Love's Labour's Won*, variously identified as the *Shrew* or *Much Ado*, and Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*. The Jonson Folio of 1616 helpfully gives us the cast: Shakespeare,

Burbage, Phillips, Hemings (*sic*), Condell, Pope, Sly, Beeston, Kemp and Duke. It has been said that *Henry V* probably saw the light at the Swan. The reference to Essex's mission in Ireland puts it in the middle months of 1599, and it was in this year that the company opened at the new Globe; but it is questionable whether the Globe was ready before the autumn, when the German Thomas Platter certainly saw *Julius Caesar* there. He might have seen *As You Like It*, too.

In 1601 the Chamberlain's Men committed an indiscretion. On the eve of Essex's rebellion certain of his partisans induced them to revivify *Richard II*, which suggestively portrayed the deposing of a monarch—although indeed the early quartos of the play omit the deposition scene. The explanation tendered by Augustine Phillips at the subsequent enquiry must have allayed the royal displeasure, for six days later the company were playing at court. We are not even sure that, as has been supposed, they were required to absent themselves from London. The competition of the child actors is enough to account for the "travelling" to which Hamlet alludes—and *Hamlet* was almost certainly produced in this same year. *Twelfth Night* came close before or after; its performance in Middle Temple Hall in 1602 was not the first. *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Troilus and Cressida* followed soon.

The company faced their Queen for the last time in 1603, some seven weeks before her death. With that event Hunsdon's office lapsed: he survived it himself by a few months only. In due course his Men were appointed by letters patent to the service of the King, with the status of Grooms of the Chamber and an allowance of red cloth for liveries. James was to prove insatiable of entertainment, and as soon as decorum permitted the court shows were resumed. Among the first plays given was Jonson's tragedy of *Sejanus*; it was held to be tainted with popery, and the author was called to account. It was in this work that Shakespeare made his last recorded appearance as an actor. As author however he figured next year (1604) in no fewer than seven productions, including the new *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*; in favour the eight-year-old *Merchant* topped the list, being commanded twice in three nights. To these years are assigned *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*; in 1607 the astounding output slackened, and *Timon of Athens* was offset by Jonson's *Volpone*. *Pericles* (c. 1608) betrays the touch of a collaborator's hand, seeming to foreshadow the author's withdrawal to Stratford and his replacing by the prolific Beau-

mont and Fletcher, whose *Philaster* (c. 1609) was the first of their compositions to be staged at court.

It will be remembered that in 1608 the cancelling of the sublease of the Blackfriars had made it possible for Burbage and the King's Men to use this theatre as their winter quarters; and there are indications that *Cymbeline* (c. 1610) was written with an indoor setting in view. Only two whole plays were now to come from Shakespeare's pen. With *A Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* and his share in *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1610-13) his work was over. The production of *Henry VIII* made an end, as we know, of the first Globe.

Their faithful poet's retirement did not deprive the King's Men of his plays, which continued to hold their own; not yet were they to experience the inevitable dating. But other names than his became more frequent in the bill: Beaumont and Fletcher with *The Maid's Tragedy* and *A King and No King* (1610-1611), Jonson with *Catiline* and *The Alchemist* (1611-12), Webster with *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1613), Heywood, Massinger, Tourneur, Ford. The company too was changing; Lowin and Field were rising names. Burbage died in 1619, three years after Shakespeare, and his place was filled by Joseph Taylor, from the Prince's Men. Of the "principall Actors" commemorated by Heminge and Condell in the Folio of 1623 twelve were by that time dead. But whatever changes may have threatened their integrity when they lost Burbage, as an institution the Kings' Men continued to thrive. The masque advanced in favour at court, but did not oust the drama. What with the tours, the Globe, the richly rewarding Blackfriars, their life was full, pleasant and honourable. In 1624 they precipitated a diplomatic crisis of some magnitude (Middletons' anti-Spanish *Game at Chess* was the offending play) and survived their sovereign's anger as they survived his death a year later, when Palsgrave's, formerly the Admiral's, Men went down. Under the new King, and with Massinger, young D'Avenant and at last Shirley serving them, they held their high state to the end, and were accordingly wiped out in 1642.

The Earl of Pembroke's Men, save for a single reference to the name in 1575, are not heard of until 1592, in the winter of which year they were seen at court. In 1593 they were travelling, as were other companies banished from town by the plague, and were on the verge of ruin, pawning their wardrobe to pay for transport and disposing of certain of their

plays to the printers, among them *The Taming of A Shrew* and Marlowe's *Edward II*. Chambers conjectures, from evidence too intricate for reproduction here, that the company originated in a subdivision, made for purposes of tour in a plague year, of the joint companies sponsored by Lord Strange and the Lord Admiral. He also surmises that Shakespeare, who was play-doctoring for Strange's Men in 1592 but is not named in their touring license of 1593, was in that year one of Pembroke's Men; that is if he was not, as some hold, sojourning in the country with Southampton, or even travelling abroad. This supposition, if upheld, would dispose at once of the notion that Shakespeare was among those actors who quitted Alleyn's service in 1594; did they, instead, seek him out and engage him in the adventure of a lifetime? The vicissitudes of Lord Pembroke's Men offer a less enticing problem. In 1597 they were with Langley at the Swan, whence a handful of them seceded to the Admiral's Men at the Rose and were sued by Langley for breach of contract. During the following years they are heard of intermittently in the provinces, and in 1600 are found playing to thin houses at the Rose, the Admiral's Men being now in possession of the new Fortune. Here the record ends; it is possible that they were merged in Lord Worcester's Men, who were then re-forming and were playing at court two years later.

Melancholy interest attaches to the Duke of York's Men, for the patron who lent them his name when he was eight years old perished in 1649 on a scaffold erected before the palace in which he may well have seen them play. A more bracing thought is that their leading man, the twenty-three-year-old Joseph Taylor who in 1619 was to step into Burbage's shoes, was at some time coached in the part of Hamlet by Shakespeare himself, and that D'Avenant's remembrance of how Taylor played it passed on, through Betterton and a long succession, to Irving.⁴

The royal patent of 1608 specifies no London headquarters for the Duke's Men. They travelled extensively, on one occasion as far as Ireland; it seems that their court appearances were made before King James's children and their young guests. But in 1612 Prince Henry died, leaving his brother Charles heir to the throne, and the Duke of York's Men accordingly became the Prince's Men. From 1615 onward they were seen successively at Porter's Hall, the Hope, the Whitefriars, the Cockpit (1619-1622), the Curtain and the Red Bull. In 1625, when their patron ascended the throne and the title lapsed, several of the players joined the King's Men.

The patroness of the Lady Elizabeth's Men was Prince Charles's sister and the elder daughter of James and Anne. She was fifteen when the patent was made out (1611), seventeen when she married the Elector Palatine, and she lived long and unhappily as the Winter Queen. In their first year the company toured, and were seen at court. Often in association with the Prince's Men and the Children of the Queen's Revels (formerly the Chapel Children), they played at the Swan, Rose and Whitefriars. Henslowe was their manager, and in 1614 they made their outstanding contribution to theatrical history by presenting *Bartholomew Fair* at the Hope. In 1616 Henslowe died, unlamented by them, for they claimed that he had used them ill, and Alleyn took charge. The title of Lady Elizabeth's Men came near to lapsing, but six years later was brilliantly resuscitated by Beeston at the Phoenix (Cockpit) with distinguished plays and players. In 1625 they shared the fate of Palsgrave's, late Admiral's, Men,⁵ for that year of plague brought them also to an end.

The patronage of Queen Henrietta's Men was assumed in 1625 by the consort of Charles I. In that year Beeston assembled them at the Phoenix (Cockpit) from the remnants of Queen Anne's Men, formerly Oxford's and Worcester's, and of the recently disbanded Lady Elizabeth's Men. They had twelve years of success, with Shirley's wit and grace at their disposal, and made a great shewing in masques, which the Queen loved, at court. 1636, another plague year, saw the last of them, and they found themselves supplanted by Beeston's Boys. The name crops up again in the record of Salisbury Court (1637-42), but of this venture little is known.

In 1631, when (as we believe) the patent of Palsgrave's Men was revived for Prince Charles's Men, the new patron was an infant not many months old, quite unaware that in time to come he was to play a considerable part in shaping our theatre's destiny. Meanwhile, at Salisbury Court, the Red Bull and the rebuilt Fortune, this company was to enjoy eleven years of life before the great darkness descended.

The companies which complete the list, with their earliest and latest dates, are: Of the Duke of Lennox, cousin to James I (1604-8), which never appeared in London; of the Earls of Arundel (c. 1500-1586), which was in town but not at court in 1561 and again, at the Curtain, in 1584; of the Earls of Bath (1542-79), heard of only in the country; of the Earls of Essex (1468-1601), seen at court once only, in 1578; of the Earl of Hertford (1582-1607), which took part in the Elvetham festivities of 1591 and played again for Elizabeth

three months before her death; of the Earls of Lincoln (1566–1609), seen at court in 1572–5; of the Earl of Warwick (1562–94), playing for the Queen in 1564 and some dozen times between 1575 and 1580; of Lord Abergavenny (1572–6), which played once in the city in its first year; of Lord Berkeley (1578–1610), who was constrained to apologise for his men's brawling with the gentlemen of the Inns of Court in 1681—but they did not appear in London again; of Lord Rich (1564–70), seen in town and at court in 1567–70; of the Lords Vaux (1579–1609), of whom little is known. Sir Robert Lane's Men (1570–2) were at court in 1571, and are thought to have passed under Lord Lincoln's protection in obedience to the Act of the following year, which recognised no patron of lower degree than a baron. The existence of "Mr Evelyn's Men" fifteen years after the passing of that Act has been vouched for by one not very reliable antiquary,⁶ but without support from his betters. It may have been in consequence of the same prohibition that for thirty years the company of Mr Robert Browne ranged the continent from the Netherlands to Styria, playing at petty courts and at Cologne, Strasburg, Ulm, Nuremburg and the Frankfort fair.

As he made his way through the tangle of evidence that awaited his elucidation, Sir Edmund Chambers must now and then have found it in his heart to wish that the theatre of that age had been a trifle less lusty and prolific, or at all events that some central authority, like a good gardener, had pruned it and directed its growth. How it would have simplified his task if by her edict of 1572¹ the Queen had even further restricted the acting profession, bringing it under her exclusive patronage and control; still more if in 1583 she had empowered Tilney to establish not merely a company of players in her name but a Theatre Royal, on to whose boards all players and plays of moment would inevitably be drawn. But even if the royal exchequer could have afforded such a proceeding the royal solace required diversity; so did the stage. It was far more fun for Elizabeth, as it was much better for our drama, that in these formative years a multitude of companies should battle for her, and the public's, favour. And indeed, in their twists and turns and transient alliances, the actors mirrored the not less complicated manoeuvres of the noblemen whose names conferred on them the rank of artist and the right to pursue their art. The struggle to survive did in fact sort out the stronger and the weaker. Of the twenty-odd companies who strutted and fretted on the scene very few

were left, at the last, for the Puritans to destroy; and the best of those few was the best of all.

Our adolescent theatre, then, derived not a little of its health from living dangerously; it thrived because it had the will to thrive. The accountants of the Revels Office—even Henslowe in his diary—do not kindle our imagination quite as the medieval guildsmen do, yet the documents are in their way as eloquent. Instead of a community's urge to act plays in its spare time and at its own expense, we have now the more formidable resolve of professional artists to spend their whole existence acting plays at the expense of the community. The individual who supports himself by practising the art of the theatre is becoming a man to reckon with. He is appraising the forces for and against him with as keen an eye as ever summed up, in harder times, the audience to whom he looked for his supper. Yet one circumstance persists from the days when he plied his magic in the market-place and banquet-hall alike; his friends are still, as we might say, in the gallery and stalls; they are at once the many-headed and the men of taste. All he needs is to be unceasingly supplied with plays of a kind that will draw them both, which our disorderly drama, thrusting from *Cambyses* to *Tamburlaine* and beyond, seems to be doing. One may dream of a state subsidy when business is bad. But who wants a subsidy, subject to official probings, when the pennies, twopences, sixpences and shillings of a packed house may bring in more than royalty itself can afford to pay? Better on the whole to draw the line at the obligatory patronage and, as to the money side of the affair, to contend perilously with one's fellow artists for survival.

But other points in the story catch our attention. We discover how often even the grandest of these troupes were on the road; mounted no doubt in some state when they were prospering, some of the poorer footing it with their baggage on their backs when it was hard to make ends meet. We learn how frequent a cause of such touring was, not the animosity of the Lord Mayor or the obstreperousness of the players, but the intermittent menace of the Plague, which in 1593 unquestionably shaped our theatre's future. Above all we have to notice the gradual emergence from the struggle of those superb rivals the Lord Admiral's Men and the Lord Chamberlain's. Both, under their later titles, endured through the reign of Elizabeth's successor; why, when James died, did one of them decline, leaving to the other seventeen years of security and renown? Certainly the King's Men had an established claim on Charles's favour. But the theatre was a popular and

self-supporting institution. Had the King's Men, then, maintained their excellence, their up-to-dateness, their style, while Palsgrave's Men, sometime the Prince's, sometime the Lord Admiral's, were going downhill? If that was so, was there some exceptional liveliness in the King's Men, and whence did it derive? What sort of people were they, these finally supreme ones and the runners up? Was there some difference in quality between them, ascribable to some difference in character between their respective leaders? Burbage died in harness in 1619, and the King's Men continued to flourish for twenty-three years. Alleyn died in retirement in 1626, when his company was the shadow of its former self. What kind of men were Alleyn and Burbage?

Chapter 15

Some Portraits

IT IS AN ODD reflection that the two companies which produced the finest acting and drama of the age owed a great deal respectively to the ex-joiner James Burbage and the quondam pawnbroker Philip Henslowe. The elder Burbage may have been a tough type, but he was an actor before he was a manager. Somehow we cannot picture Henslowe on the stage: much as we have to thank him for, there is that trail of usury across the pages of the diary, and usurers are not expansive people, as actors must be. There is warrant for supposing that with the two Burbages the theatre came first and money a wholesomely close second; with Henslowe, even with Alleyn as he grew older, we are not so sure. Alleyn was a shrewd, and in his retirement a public-spirited, man of affairs; Burbage in his spare time was a painter. Alleyn, if we go by his parts, was the born virtuoso of a one-man show; Burbage, if we go by his, was at his happiest in a confraternity of artists: if he had not had some natural affinity with Shakespeare that partnership would not have held as it did. We might dispose our minds to a fair comparison of these two great players if we pictured Alleyn with Henslowe behind him, and Burbage with Shakespeare leading him on.

Here they are, in the Dulwich Gallery. We must not be swayed by the manifest superiority of Alleyn's portrait as a painting. It has been said that Burbage's is his own work, but there is nothing to support this save the fact that fine actors do feel a peculiarly detached interest in their own faces, and that Burbage, being skilled with the brush, may have found it amusing to put his faithful servant on canvas.

Both bearded like the pard, they by no means resemble actors of to-day. Alleyn's is eminently a Founder's face; we want to shave them both. But even as they are we can detect certain characteristics which still denote the player. Their mouths are humorous and mobile but firm, able to shape words and shut like a trap when they have done speaking. Their eyes are large, luminous and steady; there are strong muscles of control here, and in the brows. There is almost a twinkle in them, in Alleyn's sardonic—perhaps only stage-

sardonic, in Burbage's benign. Alleyn's upper lip is long, a tragedian's; Burbage's is shorter, more of a comedian's. There is explosive power in Alleyn; power seems rather to radiate from Burbage. Are we reading too much into these likenesses, or do they really set before us the two unchanging types of great acting, the dæmonic and the protean?

Alleyn, it is true, is praised by Thomas Heywood as "Proteus for shape and Roscius for a tongue". But his most famed parts, Heironimo, Tamburlaine, Faustus and Barabas, do not—whatever he may have put into them—run the human gamut as does the long line which extends from Benedick to Lear. An old playgoing memory was to recall Burbage as "so wholly transforming himself into his part, and putting off himself with his clothes, as he never (not so much as in the tiring-house) assumed himself again until the play was done".¹ Nashe, in *Pierce Pennilesse*, wished that Alleyn might be sent abroad to shew the foreigners what English acting could be; but that was eight years before Burbage had risen to the summit of his fame.

Edward Alleyn, the son of a Buckinghamshire innkeeper but claiming descent from the ancient Lancashire family of the Townleys, was born in 1566 and "was bred a stage-player". At seventeen he was one of Lord Worcester's Men; at twenty-three he had already joined the Lord Admiral's. His ascent was rapid—more rapid, it has been conjectured, than was good for his style; for he was not long out of his teens when he first played his two greatest parts. At twenty-six he was established, and married Henslowe's stepdaughter Joan Woodward. His letters, written on tour to his "good sweete Mouse", are conjugal and domestic in tone, all about his waistcoat and stockings, his kitchen garden, his horse; there is hardly a word of how the shows are going, nor are they letters of one who was daily drowning the stage in blood or scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword. At thirty-one his savings and investments enabled him to retire. At thirty-four, under royal pressure, he came back, this time to his new-built Fortune; at thirty-nine he obtained the Paris Garden post, jointly with Henslowe. Much profitable speculation followed, and he was already treating for the manor of Dulwich. At forty-eight he had completed the purchase (let us use present-day equivalents) for a hundred thousand pounds; at fifty-one he had built the College and was administering it himself at the rate (by the same reckoning) of seventeen thousand a year. When he was fifty-seven Joan died, and he married Constance Donne, the twenty-year-old daughter of the Dean of

St Paul's. Dr. Donne demurred at the match, and Alleyn's correspondence on the subject shews that he maintained in life the dignity for which he was celebrated on the stage²; if the knighthood which he may or may not have looked for had been conferred, he would have worn it well. He died in 1626.

Richard Burbage's date of birth is not certainly known. If, as believed, it was 1567; he was Alleyn's junior by one year and Shakespeare's by three. He did not rocket to success; it would seem that his most memorable performance in his twenty-third year was the routing of the angry Mrs. Brayne. And in that year the Admiral's Men and their young star were tenants of his father's theatre, with *Tamburlaine* and *The Spanish Tragedy* no doubt in the bill. Burbage was among them: one of their stage plots tells us that he walked on for them as a messenger. An "R. Burbadg" appears also in the plot of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, known to have been a play of Queen Elizabeth's Men which passed to the Lord Admiral's. His association with this company has been dated as early as 1584, and what other and better parts came his way we do not know, nor how far Alleyn grounded him in the art which with Shakespeare's help he was to make all-embracing. At twenty-seven he was destined to become a luminary in his own right; yet Cuthbert Burbage, who survived him by many years, would recall his brother's life as a continual struggle to provide for his wife and children.

It was no less a struggle for the security, and honour, of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. 1594 marks the beginning of their joint story, for it was in that year of moment for the stage that Burbage and the seceders from Alleyn at the Rose revived the drooping title and installed themselves at The Theatre; at Christmas they were twice seen at court, and he, Shakespeare and Kemp were deputed to receive the royal reward. As once with the less schooled Alleyn, we see him rising abruptly to the great parts; as not with Alleyn, who had lost his sole great poet the year before, the ascent opens up higher peaks beyond, and we can watch his powers expanding as he and Shakespeare make their discoveries together: noting by the way that in the kind of drama favoured by this sodality all the parts are so good that it is often hard to decide which is the best. It is by his exploration of the human heart, faithfully pursued, that the actor of protean quality mounts from fineness to greatness. Burbage, like Alleyn, lived to meet the great as equals, on terms of mutual respect; and it was a matter of scandal to the Puritans that his death was mourned as widely as the Sovereign's had been. This was in 1619, when he was

a little over fifty. The story that he died of an apoplexy has been invoked to reconcile us to the uncongenial notion of a Hamlet who was fat and scant of breath. It is said that he left the present equivalent of three thousand a year in land to Winifred Burbage and three surviving issue, one of whom was posthumously born. In John Davies's view he was "guerdoned not to his desert".³ It seems that he was a venturer chiefly in his art; in the handling of real estate he did not rank with Alleyn.

What conclusions are to be drawn about them both from these few facts and guesses? As their generation saw them, was Alleyn of the old school and Burbage of the new? It is reasonable to suppose so. Yet the elderly and honoured Burbage might have rebuked a young admirer who opined in his hearing that Alleyn was, as we should say, Ham; even as, one hopes, the great men of to-day would snap off the heads of any persons so lacking in perspective as to extol them at the expense of Irving.

Actors are of their age; they have no choice. An age, in the theatre, may be of very brief duration; in the forward-pushing theatre it was. Alleyn belonged to the age of Kyd, Greene and Marlowe, Burbage to the age of Shakespeare; little more than a quarter of a century embraces the two. Both men clearly had presence, magnetism and creative imagination of the kind an actor needs. Burbage's voice must have been in its way as fine an instrument as Alleyn's, yet of a different kind, differently used for different ends. We can imagine an old playgoer hearing for the first time one of those explosions of near-nonsense which glorify the tragedies of Shakespeare at their climatic moments, and wishing that Alleyn could have spoken the lines; Alleyn, he might say, would have put your reason to sleep and taken your heart by storm. To which a younger playgoer might reply, Yes, indeed; but this Burbage, helped by a poet of uncannily delicate perception, has so awakened our reason with his plausibilities, if they are not in fact plain logic and truth, that he cannot put it to sleep, nor would he; he sets mind and heart singing together. What are your Alleyn's harmonics beside an achievement like that?

So, we shall best arrive at the difference in quality between the two if we consider what was required of them by the parts they played. We need only compare, say, *The Spanish Tragedy* with the *Hamlet* that we know. Early in the former play Heironimo turns mad and plans revenge. Early in the latter Hamlet turns seeming-mad, and plans revenge. In both, once the revenge motive is established it impels the external

action of the drama. And with that the similarity may be said to end. For Hamlet grows; Heironimo does not. Neither part can be played without *le diable au corps*. But the magic of a fine Hamlet is that at last it seems as if he has left no human thought unspoken. The magic of Alleyn's Heironimo, we may surmise, was that when, tongueless and bleeding, he brought his sustained bravura to a close there was no note, no modulation in the human register that had not been passionately sounded. It was a new kind of drama with which the Lord Chamberlain's Men were concerned, and it called for a new kind of playing.

After the giants, the highest in popular regard were the clowns. Clowns may be classed as active and passive, positive and negative; it is rarely that both merge in the holy idiocy of a Grock. The negative clown had existed from remote antiquity as his superior's butt or zany; turning actor, he might make a good Aguecheek. The Elizabethan leading-comic was positive, a busy, thrusting fun-maker. Little Richard Tarleton, snub-nosed and squint-eyed, was according to some a swineherd's boy, picked up by Lord Leicester's Men in the course of a provincial tour. He may have been, as others allege, at some time landlord of the Saba tavern in Gracechurch Street, living there in sin with a woman known as Kate. But his queer little face peeping round the arras was a herald of delight; and in virtue of his jigs—we have some words and music still—self-accompanied on pipe and tabor, of his inexhaustible patter in travesty of important persons and his genuine skill in the art of fence, he ranked as one of London's worthies. Joining Queen Elizabeth's Men on their formation in 1583, he became in consequence a groom of the chamber and was made free of the court, where he could “undumpish” Her Majesty, as the saying was, at his pleasure; only once did his inborn lack of veneration carry him too far, when he invited rebuke by a sally directed against his former patron. As writer he is credited with *The Seven Deadly Sins*, of which only the aforesaid “plot” survives, and more doubtfully with a hand in *The Famous Victories of Henry V*. The Queen's Men declined after his death in 1588, and it has been thought that Shakespeare was paying tribute to his memory when he wrote of Yorick.

Fellow of infinite jest as he was, he belonged to a theatre that had not yet compassed the interweaving of sentiment and laughter; he was a master of the gag, and would certainly have irked his panegyrist as one of those clowns who say more

than is set down for them. There is little doubt that this is how Shakespeare came to regard Will Kemp, on whom Tarleton's mantle fell. Kemp, first heard of when Leicester summoned him to the Netherlands in 1585, became an original Chamberlains' Man nine years later. His vein was Tarleton's, and he appears to have exploited it, and his own personality, with no less gusto than his predecessor. His *Nine Days Wonder*, commemorating his dance from London to Norwich for a wager, reveals him as the centre of his own universe and very well pleased with himself. His name occurs in the first cast of *Every Man in His Humour*, and through an error in the Folio of 1623 we learn that he was Dogberry in *Much Ado*. Dogberry is his last recorded Shakespearean part; did he try to gild that refined gold, and did friction ensue? It seems he was not in *Hamlet*, and that as far as he was concerned the famous injunction was retrospective. For he sold his share in 1599, the year of the Globe's opening, and it was as a free-lance that next year he danced to Norwich. If the gaiety of his little book rings a trifle false the reason may be that he was uncertain of his future. He was fond of travelling, and played abroad again; thereafter it is likely that Worcester's Men received him at the Rose, for that was Henslowe's house, and in 1602 he figures in the Diary as a debtor. It is believed that he died a year after. His dancing shoes still hang in Norwich Guildhall.

His successor in Dogberry was almost certainly Robert Armin, trained by Tarleton as a clown but, we may suspect, an actor into the bargain. For the truth is that as in Shakespeare's hands the play becomes a homogeneous work of art there is less and less room for the clown's function. He is outgrowing himself in *Twelfth Night*, very much so in *As You Like It*; in *All's Well* and *Othello* he is a shadow of what he was, and as the little creature who quakes in the hovel with Lear he is transfigured by great drama and dies. Trinculo may resume the motley, but only as the costume of an actor playing a part. The pure clown had even shorter shrift from Ben Jonson, whose comedies present a gallery of types, all funny, and require that every actor shall be a comedian and that every clown shall learn to act. But the pure clown is not an actor, as actors understand the term; the better he is the more likely that he will knock the play to pieces. Accordingly the pure clown now pursues his ancient art in a more congenial sphere, leaving the high comedian to wonder what *he* would do if he were sent on all alone for twenty minutes, to be funny out of his own head.

The story of Burbage's comrades and successors is in the main one of sobriety and security; the grave men of Blackfriars, they were called. We could wish the records told us as much about parts, and by whom played and how, as they do about theatre-shares, churchwardenships or the like, weddings, baptisms, burials and solid legacies. Augustine Phillips, who had helped start the venture and was a foundation shareholder in the Globe, was entitled by his position in the company to act as their spokesman in the trouble over *Richard II*; we must piece him together as best we can from the facts that he devised a "Gygg of the slyppers", that he acquired a dubious coat-of-arms and a country house at Mortlake, and that when he died in 1605 he left behind him sundry musical instruments and token bequests to Shakespeare and other friends who were as comfortably circumstanced as he. John Heminge and Henry Condell, to whom we owe the Folio, were extensive shareholders in the Globe and Blackfriars, with a corresponding voice in their direction; Heminge in particular is thought to have acted as business manager from 1611 if not before, running also, but under his wife's supervision, a grocery establishment in Shoreditch. As a player he is credited with the creation of Falstaff. Ben Jonson writes of him as old and stuttering at the burning of the Globe in 1613, but he survived that disaster, discharged his pious task as editor, and died in 1630. Condell is first heard of in *Every Man in His Humour*; his holding in the Blackfriars dated from its inception, and in the Globe from 1612. Two years later he was the first cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi*; on his death in 1627 he left a good estate and a house at Fulham, having retired from acting some ten years before.

Image-making, we find, is not easy when the painter has transmitted nothing and the known parts are few. Among comedians we may thank Thomas Pope, shareholder in the Globe and Curtain, who was Kemp's contemporary and conjecturably his foil, and died in 1604; Richard Cowley, who played Verges to Kemp's Dogberry, later no doubt to Armin's, and died in 1619; John Shank, who on Armin's death in 1615⁴ succeeded him, and died himself in 1636; it is remarkable how seldom we learn when these men were born and how often when they died, since they died leaving property behind them. Of Shakespeare's heroines, Juliet and Portia have been assigned to Robert Gough, who became Phillip's brother-in-law and the inheritor of his share; he died in 1625. If indeed he played the fourteen-year-old Juliet when he himself was that age, he must have been in his early twenties when the great

tragedies began to appear. It is a fact that Shakespeare's heroines steadily mature from Beatrice and Rosalind onward; even their voices seem to deepen. And it is tempting to picture a single player following the line to its culmination in a Cleopatra who had no use for squeaking boys (and did not bell-mouthed old Volumnia follow?) while the Cordelia, perhaps, was qualifying for Imogen; but we do not know.⁵ In the year of *Cymbeline* Richard Robinson, supposedly a Chapel Child, joined the King's Men: was the Imogen of 1611 the ill-starred Duchess of ten years later (when we do not know that young John Thompson played Julia), continuing in parts of the same type for a further ten years? There is a kind of pattern here, reinforced possibly by the advent of William Trigg in 1626, when Robinson was in or near his thirties. Robinson married Winifred Burbage, and is believed to have come thus into possession of the family holding in the Blackfriars and the Globe; he died in 1648. Thompson died in 1634, before his adult powers had time to ripen. Trigg passed to Beeston's Boys when the Civil War was brewing and outlived the Commonwealth; he abandoned the stage, and the date of his death is not known.

Of the little eyases whose competition had for a brief spell embarrassed the King's Men several, as they grew up, joined their ranks and rose to fame. John Underwood was eighteen when in 1608 they picked him from the Children whom they ousted from Blackfriars; he died in 1624, a shareholder in both theatres and in the Curtain. William Ostler, also of the Children, was praised as "a king of actors" while Burbage was still living; he married Heminge's daughter and died also with a holding in the two houses; he was the first Antonio in the *Duchess*. Most brilliant of all perhaps was Nathan Field. The son of a Puritan divine, he was plucked from school at thirteen as a likely recruit for the Chapel Children, which indeed he proved to be; Jonson coached him and helped him to keep up his classics. At twenty-six he was with the Lady Elizabeth's Men, at twenty-eight with the King's, a cloak-and-sword romantic. So the Dulwich portrait shews him; so may we picture him in his favourite part of Chapman's Bussy. Fiery and graceful, he mirrors the theatre of his day, seeming to tell us how it felt to be a favoured leading juvenile in times when the battle for security was won. Not quite the force, here, of Alleyn and Burbage; of a less tough generation, it may be. His life is said to have been scandalous; he died in 1620, when he was thirty-seven.

We have no likeness of the dashing Joseph Taylor who in

1619, being then twenty-four, came from the Lady Elizabeth's Men to fill the parts left vacant by the death of Burbage. Later, when Heminge and Condell were both gone, he assumed with John Lowin the control of the company. Esteemed no less for his stage-craft than for his acting, he lived on into the dark days of the suppression and died in 1652. Failing his portrait, here is Lowin's still to be seen in the Ashmolean at Oxford. The inscription dates him. He was born in the first year of James Burbage's Theatre; the grave old eyes that meet ours had looked on many things, *quorum pars magna*. Falstaff, Volpone, Melantius, Bosola. He had lived right through the golden age, and in 1640 may well have known it was drawing to an end.

Chapter 16

Acting and Style

THESE SURMISES ABOUT the men who first played the great parts of Shakespeare help us hardly more than their few extant portraits toward any conjecture as to what they were like in speech and action on the stage. Once again we can try to approach them by way of the mind's ear, reading the lines they spoke and guessing at the quality of their voices; or through the mind's eye, studying once more the Advice to the Players, only to discover that in fact it consists largely of a number of Don'ts of which we cordially approve. The palmy days to come left us a sufficiency of drawings that tell not only how the great players of that time appeared in action but how they wished to be remembered; these days, no less splendid if the acting matched the drama, bequeathed us a few vile woodcuts and one daub, from which we learn little or nothing of how English acting made its way from Cambyzes to Tamburlaine and from Tamburlaine to Hamlet. Was this transformation carried through, in thirty-nine years, by the light of nature? Or did we learn something, even in that era of insular defiance, from abroad? For example, did the Italian Comedians help us at all on our way?

The humbler kind of student used to be rather abashed when he first heard of the *Commedia dell' arte* from persons who were clearly much better educated than himself; the name smacked of a very untheatrelike erudition, even of preciosity. If, unrebuffed, he proceeded to find out what it stood for, he soon was on terms with an art that was beyond reckoning old, impenitently popular, superlatively polished and, in its inheritors, still very much alive. No whiff of the coteries or schools assailed his nostrils; actuality, rather, came upon him with a strong aroma of sweat, garlic and country wine—not to say of goat, for there is something of the cloven hoof about Callot's black drawings: they are not for nervous children.

Commedia dell' Arte signifies Professional Comedy. Descent has been claimed for it from the rustic farces of Etruria; but its chief distinction was the expertness, ensemble and style of the performers. It embodied the actor's theatre at its highest

power. For its dialogue was improvised, controlled only by a scenario or plot; its characters were the universal prototypes of the harlequinade. It exacted from the performer a perpetually alert invention, since he had to speed the play along its appointed course with words made up by himself; it also called for a physical deftness which to-day we might find incredible. One of the plays was *Il Convitato di Pietra*, which in Molière's hands became *Le Festin de Pierre* and in da Ponte's, for Mozart, *Don Giovanni*. We are told that when Trivellino, later Sganarelle, later Leporello, was bidden to drink to the ghost of the Commendatore it was his practice to throw a somersault expressive of terror, holding his wine-glass and not spilling the wine. It is also said that at the age of eighty-three one Tiberio Fiorelli could still box a man's ear with his foot. That may suggest nothing more impressive than the agility of a stroller in a booth; but there was no garlic, so to say, about the Comedians when in the sixteenth century Paris took them to its arms. Like the Russian ballet of a later age they became the centre of a cult, a byword for everything that was accomplished and adventurous in the theatre. Nor that only: Isabella Andreini, "lovely of name, lovely of body and loveliest of mind", was honoured also for her writings, beautiful Lidia da Bagnacavallo for her learning and wit. Through some two hundred years the *Commedia dell' Arte* was a moulding force in European acting. It stood for Style. Mantzius claims that within a generation it transformed the French stage, and adduces two prints in proof of the assertion.¹ Its types live on in our Restoration drama and beyond; how far, if at all, did its style shape the playing at the Globe?

To some extent, we may venture to suppose. It was from Italy that Renaissance England learned the art of writing plays. Elizabeth had some Italian pensioners about her; the court musician Alfonso Ferrabosco lent a hand in the masques Englishmen travelled, actors among them, who on return must have spoken of what they had seen of the theatre abroad. At long intervals Italian companies visited England; in 1574 the Recorder of London inveighed against "the unchaste, shamelesse and unnaturall tombling of the Italian weomen"—although they had tumbled before the Queen that summer. These, and a troupe seen at court two years later, may have been acrobats only. But there is little doubt that in 1578 the company of Drusiano Martinelli brought the authentic thing to London.

Of the two French prints contrasted by Mantzius, one shews a clump of louts, each playing for himself and not too easy

about his hands and feet; in the second, dated a few years later, a balanced group of artists are playing to each other and are individually self-controlled to the tips of their fingers and toes. Did such a reform follow the visit of Martinelli's people to our shores? There has been much speculation about that "plot" of *The Seven Deadly Sins* which was found among the Dulwich papers. Tarleton, the supposed author, or deviser, was a master of extemporary patter, and there is even a hole in the card to hang it up by, as if in order that players on the Italian model might refresh their memories by glancing at it before they went on. But just such a plot would have been needed, and was surely used then as to-day, to refresh the memory of a stage-manager in charge of a show. There is in fact no evidence that we cultivated the drama of improvisation at a higher level than that of the gagging clown and the penny gaff, in which latter institution it was still flourishing within living remembrance.

But whatever impression Martinelli made on his English audience, we must not imagine that this brief visit had any immediate or revolutionary effect on English acting. It is even possible that English actors knew something of the *Commedia dell' Arte* before he came. For the theatre, in virtue of its divine origin, is international, needing everywhere technical aids to self-expression that are fundamentally the same. Mysteriously, it seems to have its own bamboo post; for no means have yet been devised of completely isolating the theatre of one people from another's. It is quite conceivable that from the infiltrating minstrels of the Conquest down to Martinelli and beyond him there was a continual exchange of information between this country and the continent as to the very latest ways of making an audience laugh and cry.

Certainly without that dual power the actor is nothing; but his urge toward self-perfection impels him to wield it in style. Now, to the Elizabethan actor, as to the Elizabethan citizen, style was the breath of life. During some perilous years our truculent little island lived on style. In the Queen's conduct of foreign affairs it was style that carried her through. "I think it foul scorn", the very best of herself expressed as splendidly as might be, is the royal embodiment of style. For the Elizabethan gentleman spaciousness was no metaphor, it was a necessity and a fact; in full rig he needed four feet of elbow-room; he could not wear his clothes without style—nor, surely, could the actor who bought them of him at second-hand. Style was the note of the age; one went to the block in style; the cutpurse ruffled it on the road to Tyburn; the very Bedlam

man, Poor Tom in *Lear*, made a panoply of his rags and was admired accordingly. With court manners as their daily example, and discarded court clothes to wear that made any player imposing if he had heart in him, and lines to speak that must have made him feel like a king when he spoke them, the Lord Chamberlain's and Lord Admiral's Men could have done pretty well in their own line without help from Drusiano's Italians. Yet some help there may have been. In the days when actors were taught a dozen things that they are not taught now, much attention was paid to the disposal of that intermittently useful but otherwise distracting agent of expression, the human hand, when it was off duty. Alleyn's hand, in the painting, is a *Commedia dell' arte* hand at rest. So, in sundry photographs and sketches, is Irving's.

But it is also a Rhetorician's hand. In those days there was another international beside the theatre; it was the art of rhetoric.² That art did not confine itself to the management of the voice, although the voice was of prime importance. Governed by the mind, it was almost equally displayed in gesture, posture and bearing. All these must conform to the contemporary notion of order, rank, degree. If one's rank was high, one must speak and move with nobility. Nothing could be more shocking than that a skipping king should amble up and down, or that a patrician Antony should draw plebeian tears and votes by publicly proclaiming himself a plain, blunt man who loved his friend; it was incumbent on the actor to accentuate the enormity of such betrayals by being himself as royal as royalty or as noble as any of Plutarch's noble Romans. The perception of quality in the individual was by no means confined to persons of quality. The Old Shepherd at once suspects the pretensions of Autolycus because, although his garments are rich, he wears them not handsomely. A young actor of to-day might be embarrassed if at an audition he were asked to come into the room successively as a king, an earl, a knight about court and a knight of the shires up from the country. But in the drama of that time such distinctions mattered greatly; it is a thing to be borne in mind when we revive the plays to-day. The Elizabethan actor had to shew himself acutely aware of degree if he was to carry the judicious, and even the unskilful, with him.

The codified art of rhetoric presented him, as indeed it presented every schoolboy, with the grammar of seemliness in speech and demeanour. The humanist of the Renaissance was keenly concerned to assert the dignity of his species. It was not enough to enjoy his privilege, among all God's creatures,

of standing and walking erect—he must stand and walk well; or of speech—he must speak well; or of reason—he must reason well. If he neglected these gifts he deserved no better than the brutes. There was nothing in the world he could not face provided he could give it a name; to be inarticulate was shaming. According as a man was the clear expression of himself in thought, speech and action, so did he rank in the catalogue of degree. Low birth did not doom him to remain a common fellow: had not the slave Roscius become great Cicero's teacher in this very art?

Apparently the children at Blackfriars were as much at their ease in the resounding periods of Jonson as they had been in the balanced felicities of Lyly; both might tax the resources of a grown-up actor to-day. But their skill was no more than the forced fruit of a training that was given to every child who went to a good school. Breathing, inflection, emphasis, phrasing, gesture and stance were as carefully taught by a conscientious master as was the writing of hexameters (from much the same sound motive) in a later age. Plays were got up not merely for fun but as part of a boy's education; when he went on to the university there were more plays; if he proceeded to the Inns of Court there were plays again. *Gorboduc* and *Arthur* are not entertainments of a kind one would expect young amateurs to pounce on; but there is no puzzle here if we reflect that through five long acts each of these ponderous works afforded an exercise in declamation according to the rules. Those rules were precise, and even in the public theatre any player of a serious part ignored them at the peril of exposing himself to the derision of a literate spectator. As to gesture they were equally precise; just after this era ended there appeared John Bulwer's *Chirologia* and *Chironomia*, with more than a hundred drawings to shew how the hand must be disposed if the action is to suit the word.³ The highest praise was intended when it was said of Burbage that he had "all the parts of an excellent orator". It was required of a performance that it should be not only true in conception but also, by those same laws of rhetoric, faultless in execution; style, in no loose meaning of the word, was an essential part of the actor's equipment. His purpose was to interpret life, not to represent it. We may picture Alleyn at white heat or Burbage accomplishing some masterstroke of naturalism, but there was no ungoverned heat, no naturalism untouched by artifice.

Artificial indeed is the word we might use if we could see such acting to-day. Overdone or vulgarly attempted, it offended Hamlet to the soul, and we can only guess how,

without loss of unity, the rigour of the code was relaxed in those plays where kings and commoners meet: how George a Greene fraternised with royal Edward. It is probable that the kingly state was awesomely maintained; we generally find it so in Shakespeare. But what of Master Ford and Master Page: were they allowed, in the playing, to step straight out of Windsor High Street? And the arch-anarch Falstaff, did he set these laws at naught like every other? They were good laws, framed to preserve man's hard-won dignity, and one would like to know what blend of knightliness and rascality Lowin contrived. As for Pistol, no style could be too royal for him.

Chapter 17

Sharing and Management

THERE HAS BEEN mention now and then of the shares held by an actor in a theatre or company, and some elucidation is needed. It is best to keep to bare essentials because, with the trading, subdivision and bequeathing of shares that became the general rule, a detailed study would be very complicated; Chambers investigated the system with his accustomed minuteness. For clarity's sake we may take as illustration the Lord Chamberlain's, later King's Men, with their two houses, the Blackfriars and the Globe. That is the actual sequence in date of holding; but we will reverse it, since the Globe was the first to become a going concern.

First, the ground landlord. The site on which the Globe was built belonged to one Nicholas Brand, who in 1598 leased it for thirty-one years to Richard Burbage, his brother Cuthbert and certain of the Chamberlain's Men. The lease was divided, one half being held by the Burbages, the other jointly by Shakespeare, Phillips, Pope, Heminge and Kemp; each party paid seven pounds five shillings ground-rent. Accordingly we may say that there were ten shares in all, of which the Burbages held five and the others one each. This was not unfair, for the brothers contributed such material for the building as they had removed to Bankside from Shoreditch; also they are supposed to have raised the cost of its re-erection by a mortgage, since it is likely that the bulk of their capital was tied up in the Blackfriars, as yet not permitted to open. As original shareholders all seven men were, as investors say, in on the ground floor; they could only have been fore favourably situated if they had bought the freehold of the site.

The landlord of the (second) Blackfriars was Richard Burbage himself. He inherited the property in 1597 from his father, who had acquired it in the year of his death from Sir William More for six hundred pounds. We have seen that, pending the Privy Council's permission to open a theatre, he leased it to Evans and Giles for performances, termed private and officially winked at, by the child actors; they paid forty pounds a year rent. In 1608, when Evans, by surrendering the tenancy, gave the King's Men access to the property, Richard

Burbage as landlord leased the Blackfriars to his brother Cuthbert, Heminge, Shakespeare, Condell, Sly and, by way of consideration, Evans. Added to these six shares there was a seventh, held by Richard Burbage himself. The arrangement was at once thrown out by the death of Sly; for our purpose it is unnecessary to pursue the transfers that followed. It is enough to observe that throughout this period theatre-holdings were constantly changing hands, and that Heminge and Condell eventually drew into theirs all the five shares in the Globe that were not vested in the brothers Burbage and their issue.

It was in this manner that an actor might become a shareholder in a playhouse. Of earlier date was the system by which he might become a shareholder in a company. We can imagine a company, in its first formation under the necessary patronage, as a banding together of actors who severally contributed to the common resources their wardrobe, properties and playscripts. The takings might be shared equally or, as was more usual, according to the individual player's contribution and his drawing-power. If the company flourished each man's value could be, and was, expressed in terms of a share, or of a multiple or fraction of a share; Hamlet in his exultation after the play-scene suggests that as an actor he would be worth a whole share, and Horatio allows that he is worth a half. The share, representing a hold on the company's assets and a claim on its receipts, became, among the players, a negotiable security. It could be sold, as Alleyn sold his on his first retirement, and it could be bought, outright or on a kind of instalment system through the aid of a Henslowe who advanced the money, thereby establishing a hold on the actor to whom he lent it.

The division of the takings between the owner or owners of a theatre and the company who played in it was based on an arrangement resembling in principle the sharing terms, or percentage agreement, of to-day; but the practice was different. The week's receipts were not divided on Saturday night in proportions specified by the contract, for reckoning was made by the day, not by the week. On each day of performance the landlord had his money-takers in one part of the house, and the money they took was his; the company had their money-takers in the rest of the house, and the money they took was the company's. With the King's Men at the Globe the fact that some of them were collectively the landlord did not affect the working of the system. Of the landlord's takings five-tenths would go to Richard and Cuthbert and one-tenth apiece to the five other sharers in the theatre. Of the company's takings

a similar division would be made, based on the company-holdings of its members. Thus it was possible for an actor to be at once a theatre-sharer and a company-sharer, and to draw money in both capacities. It was generally such men who became rich, particularly if, like Alleyn, they had a flair for dealings in other kinds of property.

The theatre-sharers, collectively or by delegation, were the managers of the theatre; they were its licensees, kept it in repair and paid the ground-rent and rates. The company-sharers, collectively or by delegation, were the managers of the company. To them fell the obtaining of licenses to perform and for the plays, the buying of the plays, wardrobe and properties, the hiring, at their own charge, of minor actors (known therefore as hired men),¹ supers, musicians, tailors, wig-makers and other craftsmen: in the words of the modern sharing agreement, the providing of all seen and heard upon the stage.

This account lays itself open to a charge of over-simplifying; in practice there were many departures from the rule. As we have seen, the King's Men were landlords and company in one; only when dividends were in question did they have to split themselves up into holders of one or other kind of share. The manoeuvres of Henslowe, and of Alleyn in association with him, must at times have greatly confused the straight relationship of company-managers and theatre-managers; that was most clearly in evidence when, for example, Lord Pembroke's Men were playing at Langley's Swan.

One thought however cannot fail to strike us. The world's greatest drama proceeded from a man who condescended now and then to think of his own affairs. Shakespeare was deservedly fortunate, as poor Greene was not, in his security; he was in on the ground floor.

Chapter 18

The Stage

SHOWMANSHIP IN THE theatre is nothing more unholy or disgraceful than the faculty of shewing to the best possible advantage whatever one feels ought to be shewn. No one should produce a play unless he has the instincts of a showman; least of all should he attempt a play of Shakespeare. That of course must not be his sole qualification. To take an extreme case, he will do well to keep away from *The Tempest* if he does not perceive at its very heart the loving-kindness and forgiveness of all wrong that become a dominant theme in Shakespeare's later writings. But if for that reason he feels no urge to make something stunning of the shipwreck and the masque, he will be suffering from a maladjustment entirely foreign to the stage on which *The Tempest* first saw the lights. The Elizabethan Methodists—it is not a bad name for those nineteenth-century Puritans of the theatre—did not greatly help a young producer to resolve this disharmony; they only entreated him to thrust Satan away. They became his inhibiting conscience, while the fiend at his other elbow whispered to him of the good time that was had by Irving and Tree. The founder of the sect was William Poel (1852-1934), as resolute a character as Irving, who was the first object of his attack. Some of his following were even fiercer precisians than the master, and between them they threatened the Shakespearean stage with a Reformation in little. They preached austerity to Tree, and might as well have preached to an orchid. But over beginners in the craft they wielded a kind of moral tyranny, giving them to understand that it was a holier thing to play *The Comedy of Errors* indifferently well on a platform than to do some justice to *Lear* within a proscenium frame. Their bible was the Folio, gags, corruptions, obscenities and all; the symbol of their cult was the bare, the chastely, indescribably bare, stage of the Elizabethans.¹

It was a weakness of the theorists in this field that they persisted in thinking of the theatre of the time as uniform and static.² Elizabeth was on the throne for twenty-seven years after the elder Burbage opened his doors in Shoreditch, and Shakespeare's maturest work was done in the reign of James.

It was an epoch of discovery in other spheres; are we to assume that between, say, *Tamburlaine* and *Henry VIII* the stage and its usages underwent no change? None, said the theorists; The Theatre became the Globe, and the Globe set the pattern for the Fortune; in which certainty they set to work on their reconstructions. Nemesis has now threatened them in the person of an American scholar.³ Before we examine the subversive opinions of Dr Hotson (who after all may be wrong) let us take a look at the Elizabethan playhouse as the research and speculation of many years have pieced it together.

All reconstructions take into account the celebrated drawing attributed to Johannes de Witt, a Dutch visitor to London who was present at a performance in the new Swan in or about 1596. It was found in a commonplace-book of his friend Arend van Buchell, to whom no doubt he related his experiences on his return. It may have been done by De Witt at Van Buchell's request; it may be nothing more than Van Buchell's jotting-down of what De Witt described. The fact that the three figures shewn on the stage are apparently Malvolio, Olivia and Maria, and that *Twelfth Night* was not yet written, does no impugn its authenticity. But the accuracy of De Witt's recollection has been challenged, for the drawing shews no inner stage.

Long after we had discarded the notion that there was traverses, or sliding curtains, between the columns supporting the canopy, this alcove stage remained an indispensable part of our conjecture. In his *Prefaces to Shakespeare* Granville-Barker repeatedly assumes its existence. Here, we said, were kings discovered in their state and Zenocrate in her bed; here was Juliet's chamber, the upper stage above it serving as her balcony. Here was displayed the absurd cauldron of Barabas, with a trap in the upper stage for him to fall through; here was "the place behind the stage" where Greene set the brazen head in *Alphonsus*. Forestage and middle stage, inner stage, upper stage: it all seemed beautifully simple; one had only to ring the changes with a little ingenuity, and the swiftly flowing action of Elizabethan drama was assured. Was De Witt's memory, then, at fault? It is odd that he should have forgotten so conspicuous a feature, if it was there. Or was the inner stage a feature of some theatres, but not of the Swan? If so, the stage construction of that time was not uniform. Within four years of De Witt's visit the builder of the Fortune was being told to copy the stage of the Globe, presumably because it

was the most up-to-date. If so, stage construction was not static.

In the prologue to this same *Alphonsus* Greene asks that his Venus shall be "let down from the top of the stage". This can only mean from the stage canopy; and the substantial columns shewn in the drawing of the Swan would have carried the appliances for such descents, inherited perhaps from the *Maître des Feintes* of the middle ages. Greene wrote this in the time of Marlowe. In Shakespeare there is plenty of trap-work from below, but no theophanies that were indisputably made from above until we come to the indoor *Cymbeline*, given at Blackfriars when presumably the tricks of the royal masques were known to the King's Men. The Hope, rushed up in 1614 by the rival management when the first Globe was rebuilding, dispensed as we know with the view-obstructing pillars that had carried the stage-roofs of earlier houses; at the Hope the stage-roof spanned the arena without intermediate supports. It may well have been too light to house the gear by which Greene's goddess had descended; one can imagine the careful Henslowe enquiring how often there was any call for such things nowadays. Again we have a hint that not all theatres were alike, and that stage construction was changing with the times.

Moreover we cannot ignore Italian influences, certainly in the theatre's decorative scheme. Because the exterior was homely and timber and thatch were used (further evidence, we were told as children, of the Elizabethan stage's robust simplicity) we were led to think of the interior in terms of farmhouse Tudor, forgetting how Italian architecture imposed its scenic quality on great houses like Hardwicke and Barlbrough, and that in all the arts Italy was our chief guide. The "sumptuous" and "gorgeous" of puritan invective suggest that James Burbage planned for a modish taste, and the Globe can hardly have been less ornate than The Theatre. In the building of the Fortune, mourned on its destruction as "the fayrest play-house in this towne", nearly one-sixth of the total cost was set aside for decoration.

But this decoration would naturally culminate in the treatment of the stage. And here there is reason to wonder whether Burbage followed Italian example not only in carving, gilding and the counterfeiting of marble, but in something more. Twelve years before the opening of the Globe Scamozzi, carrying on the work of Palladio, had completed the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza.⁴ It is by no means unlikely that Burbage was acquainted with this famous theatre's design. Planned for

tragedy according to the classic rules, the permanent setting of the Olimpico did not in every respect meet the needs of the unity-defying drama of the Globe. None the less it could not fail, assuming that Burbage did in fact know about it, to fire the imagination of a stage-player who was also a painter. For the central arch of Palladio's tremendous façade and the apertures on either side of it are backed by scenic vistas, modelled in a sharp perspective that most clearly derives from Serlio; enclosing this background there is a plaster sky, once lit by a multitude of hidden lamps.⁵ Whatever the impact on Burbage, if any, this combination of the real and half-real was tempting to Italian craftsmen. Within thirty years the wide archway of the Olimpico begot the much wider proscenium of the Teatro Farnese, and from that moment the course of European theatre-design was set. In England, it is generally supposed, the notion of a frame and curtain reached us by way of the masque, in which the abrupt disclosing of marvels was a matter of importance. A whole essay might be written on the apocryphal function of the act-drop, on its power to excite our anticipation when it is about to rise and the finality, not yet improved on, with which it falls. At the Globe, as we were often reminded in our youth, there were no such base devices. The end never came with a swish and a soft thud; the healthy-minded actors of that time either danced off or collected their dead and removed them with appropriate solemnity. Yet we may be fairly sure that the inner stage at least had curtains, and that they were used sometimes with dramatic intent and effect, else how could Raleigh have written of "drawne curtaynes when the play is done"? It is more important to note the affinity between Burbage's alcove and Palladio's arch: both could frame a picture and, as in due course they expanded, were to frame a scene.

It was Poel's honourable aim to restore Shakespeare to the stage for which he wrote; but beyond his conviction that its action was not hampered by scenery he had no very precise conception of what that stage was like. He started his crusade with little to help him beyond the Swan drawing and the knowledge that *Twelfth Night* was played in Middle Temple Hall. It was here that under his direction the Elizabethan Stage Society initiated a series of performances in which, through the ten years of its existence, theory was put to the test of practice. As they proceeded guesses became—or seemed to become—certainties, and the reconstructions we now have owe them much. Of these, three notable examples are the

work of Mr Topham Forrest, Mr Walter Godfrey and Mr Walter Hodges.

In his Globe Mr Topham Forrest faithfully reproduces, so far as they are known, the stage dimensions which the Fortune took over. He faces the problem of traps, going so far as to provide a basement to accommodate them. No apparatus is indicated for descents from above, but his stage-canopy just allows room for it. He duly shews the inner and upper stages, and his forestage is railed about with a low balustrade. The columns are handsome, but the rest of his design seems to favour the farmhouse Tudor aforesaid. He is not alone in his assumption that the Globe had many seats, as the French say, for the blind. Yet it is hard to believe in a theatre in which a third of its better-class patrons could not see the upper stage.

Mr Godfrey in his Fortune has more data to go by and proceeds further in conjecture. He makes the same provision for traps, and moreover shews a hoist for lowering apparitions as far as the floor of the upper stage. His obliquely-placed doors, with practicable windows above them, tend to ease the actor's angles of approach. His decoration of the interior is Italianate in style. But he, too, runs into trouble with his sight-lines. From the central portion of his highest tier it is barely possible to see the boards of the upper stage, but not the persons on them; from the ends of the same tier little could be seen but the tiling of the stage roof. Evidently he also was bothered by the low canopy shewn in De Witt's drawing.

Mr Hodges, working from the conclusions of Mr Cranford Adams, disposes of this problem at one stroke by boldly raising the canopy of the Globe to the level of the roofing of the tiers. At once we have a stage we can understand, reasonably visible in every part from every quarter, adaptable, fully equipped with doors, windows and balconies on two floors. Here is Greene's divinity (or whoever it may be) hanging by a wire, and one notes the painted cloud that masks the opening through which the descent has been made. Here too deference is paid to the contention that the projecting forestage was wedge-shaped. Not only that but, by extending this middle-stage laterally, Mr Hodges makes room for those perplexing gallants, who can now see the play without impeding its action or blocking the view of the groundlings. It is the most satisfactory reconstruction so far.

All this patiently built edifice is now threatened with destruction at Dr Hotson's hands. But we shall understand his argument better if we keep him waiting a little longer, while

we consider briefly the conditions governing performances at court.

The Revels accounts abound in mention of "houses" as part of a show's equipment. These houses are in direct descent from the mansions of the Mysteries; the name signifies any scenic structure. But the method of their use at Elizabeth's court is of more complicated derivation, and to trace this we must again turn to Italy. When the Italians learned from Vitruvius that the works of Plautus and Terence were written to be played, they quickly evolved for the chief characters an arrangement of dwellings, usually represented by doorways, that was not unlike the Roman original and was "real" enough to be called scenic.⁶ Serlio developed the notion in his exemplary settings for tragic, comic and satyric, or pastoral, plays. All three are in strongly marked perspective, which is not surprising in an age that was exulting in its mastery of this art and was soon to learn through its scenepainters what tricks could be played with it. These settings in perspective are built, not painted; one shows a street of palaces, one a street of houses, one a diminishing prospect of rocks, homesteads and trees. All such were for a drama that observed the unity of place. For a drama that renounced it there came into being a system known to the French as the *décor simultané*. According to this system the unlocalised acting area was encircled by set-pieces — houses, in Revels Office language — representing the various places in which the action was supposed to occur. We, the audience, knew where we were once we had observed from which house the players entered; and having thus established the locality they were free to take the whole stage for their scene. In short, in the *décor simultané* the story-telling sequence of the medieval mansions was remodelled for the purposes of a play.

There is a strong presumption that Lyly, writing primarily for the court, had this sort of staging in mind. The requirement for *Campaspe* were simple: a palace for Alexander, a tub for Diogenes and a workshop-studio for Apelles. For *Sapho and Phao* they were rather more elaborate, since we are entitled to guess that they included not only Sapho's palace and Vulcan's forge but a river and a ferry-boat for Phao: the middle ages have taught us that there was realism before there was scenery. For *Endymion* they may have been more elaborate still. The demands of the court play became more exacting as time went on, until in 1611 *The Tempest* appeared at Whitehall in a masque setting as complete as that accorded to Jonson's *Oberon* a few months earlier.⁷ The Revels Office

evidently prided itself on its stock, and spared no pains in adding to it such new items as the plots submitted to it might specify. Palaces, castles, temples, grottos, groves, mountains and clouds are all indicated, and much beside. How these components of a *décor simultané* were arranged we do not know, nor even if the method was invariably the same. For there is decidedly an echo of Serlio (who died in the year of Lyly's birth) in the Revels' concern for "judgment in sight of perspective and architecture", and we are tempted to wonder whether their "great cloths" may not have been backcloths: a speculation which, coupled with that mention of clouds, leads us toward the picture-stage of the masque. At all events a modern designer would have no difficulty in building up out of such units a composite scene that would be fanciful, practicable and charming. But as to this matter of arrangement we shall learn something from Dr Hotson, for whom we are now ready.

He is the authority to whom we owe, among other things, our knowledge of the facts of Marlowe's death, the identification of Justice Shallow and the precise dating of the *Merry Wives*; his argument claims our respect. It runs as follows: First, it is inconceivable that the mode of presentation employed in the public theatre was any other than that employed at court, since a company bidden to court could not alter its show. Secondly and consequently, if we can once establish how a play was given before the Queen we shall know how it was given at the Globe. Thirdly, we can in fact establish this from evidence supplied, not by the Revels, but by the Office of Works, whose business it was to erect the stage and seating. Fourthly, according to that evidence the court stage was not at the end of the hall but in the centre of it, and was completely encircled by spectators. Fifthly, we are for this reason altogether mistaken in our conception of the Globe, which was veritably an O, a three-tiered circus; there were no inner or upper stages, but one centrally placed platform on which their functions were fulfilled by a number of scenic erections suited to the needs of the play and often of the most ingenious and beautiful design. Lastly, in this amphitheatre setting the plays of Shakespeare assumed a force and significance beyond our imagining; restored to it, Dr Hotson concludes, they will give up secrets we have never even suspected.⁸

One thing must be said in favour of his method of approach: he works forward from the past and not, as some of us are inclined to do, backward from the present; this theatre of his inherits the arena stage and mansions of the middle ages.

But the validity of his argument depends on his premise; if that can be disputed the rest becomes a matter of doubt. And it is a fact that actors not only can but do alter their shows to fit their surroundings. The touring companies of the late Sir Philip Ben Greet would cheerfully play *The Merchant of Venice* in a theatre one evening and in a garden the next afternoon. Moreover it is known that at St John's, Clerkenwell, a play due for presentation at court was rehearsed under the Master's eye. Was this for censoring and polishing only, or was it not in order that it might be adapted to the court stage?

As to the conditions at Whitehall, it is impossible to believe that the proscenium setting of Jacobean masque, with its manifold hidden contrivances, was visible from every direction. But Dr Hotson adduces the Works' Accounts, backed by contemporary descriptions, in proof that in the last years of Elizabeth's reign the court plays at least were given on "a broad stage in the middle of the hall" with "degrees placed round about it"—which signifies that the beholders sat in tiers on all four sides. This seems incontrovertible, and one does not demur at his assumption that the "houses" demanded by the action were set at the extremities of the stage, to left and right of the throne, so as to obscure the general view as little as possible. It was not what one could call an egalitarian arrangement. The play was played to the Queen, and persons at the Queen's end of the hall would see it best. Those sitting half-way down it might be incommoded by the houses and would see the action as it were in profile; those at the further end would see less of the players' faces than of their backs. But at court degree governed all, and it was in any case a privilege to be present.

But what of the audience at the Globe? Here also there was degree, but determined for the most part by the prices charged, with one possible exception. In our discussions as to the whereabouts of the so-called Lords' Room — which Mr Hodges places credibly in the side boxes—it was often held that the Lords in question were those dimly observable figures on the upper stage of the Swan drawing, who are watching the play, like the least favoured spectators at court, from behind.⁹ In reply to which it would be asked why the Lords, of all people, should be so accommodated, unless indeed they carried to excess the practice of going to the play to be seen and not to see. But in the present context this leads to a much wider question: Why, unless the facts compel us, should we dismiss De Witt as untrustworthy in principle and detail alike, and go

out of our way to construct a theatre in which at one splendid moment of the play or another a large sector of the audience would inevitably be at the same disadvantage as the supposed Lords in their box behind the stage of the Swan?

It is not the facts that point us to any such conclusion, but rather Dr Hotson's belief that the Elizabethans excelled in a kind of all-round-the-compass acting which sublimated, so to say, the technique of the ringmaster and the clown. Certainly that technique was used with sublime effect by Reinhardt in *The Miracle* at Olympia, a wordless spectacle on so vast a scale that only huge gestures told.¹⁰ But is it the best technique for the exchanges of Benedick and Beatrice: would we not prefer to see their faces all the time? Has not the slow evolution of the theatre reached that consummation, and are we likely to better it?

The most economical way of testing this theory would be by means of a model. Let us, then, build our amphitheatre of three unbroken tiers, and set in the midst of it the stage from which Hamlet is to distribute "To be or not to be" with strict impartiality. It measures on full scale forty-three feet by twenty-seven and a half. Above it was must raise a lofty canopy, supported on four columns, not two, and capacious enough to house our apparitions and the mechanics who are to wind them up and down. We must make up our minds about access from the tiring-house; shall we put it under the stage, in the dark and among the traps, or build a tunnel; or shall our players elbow their way through a pit in which every square foot is worth a penny? Now let us set our houses; it is when we consider how these are to be disposed that our real difficulties may begin, and they will not be eased by our having to leave room for the gallants and their stools. Four will perhaps see us through *Romeo and Juliet*, although six will be better, for in this kind of setting everyone must come from somewhere, and a Capulet cannot enter from the house of Montague. In *Henry V* we shall need more, in *Richard III* still more, even if the soldiers set and strike the opposed tents as part of the action. If we change houses in the course of the play (how long an interval for this?) what becomes of the vaunted continuity—and whence, on this island stage, can the fresh houses appear, save from the cellar? We are told that these houses were very handsome; they must also have been rather large, high enough for a man to walk into, some of them two-storeyed, some wide enough to contain the token armies that marched upon the scene with drums and colours—elsew here did they march from and to? But the most notable

thing about them, it seems, was that without being exactly transparent they never blocked the view of the encircling audience. Transpicious is Dr. Hotson's word for them. It is a fatal word, and we may think that with it his case, weakened already by a question-begging premise, falls to the ground. Perhaps, after all, our model-building need go no further than a transpicious house for Shylock, through which we can comfortably watch the Tubal scene. For if we go on to the end, trying out every play in the canon—and some of Greene's by way of further test—with chessmen for actors, we are likely to find the problem of orientation insoluble, and not by any means to be disposed of by saying that that was where the Elizabethans' ingenuity came in.

Such adventurousness of mind deserves a better acknowledgement than so blunt a refutation as this. And indeed there is such a thing as arena acting, and very thrilling it can be, as Reinhardt knew. Only it is not the kind of acting that can be hedged about with houses. It goes with the march of Tamburlaine, not with Faustus in his study. It is true also that the orthodox reconstructers still leave us unsatisfied on many points. Those inner and upper stages, for example, the alleged scene of many intimate happenings; Dr Hotson is not the first to point out that at the Globe and Fortune they were nearly thirty feet back from the pit. And however we may seek to better those villainous sight-lines, the pillars of the canopy must have cut off both from not a few, until the Hope dispersed with pillars. Was it then in this remote alcove that the Veronese fathers shook hands across the bodies of their young, and Bassanio meditated on the caskets, and the Witches hung over their brew, and Othello looked his last on Desdemona, and Cordelia coaxed her father back to sanity? Assuredly not, however congruent the notion may be with the slickly working stage that we, still obedient to the rule of front scene, half set and full set, have conjured up. Governed by our excellent discipline of the act-drop, we find it hard to reconcile ourselves, as perhaps we must, to the idea of masked property-men unobtrusively providing, and removing when done with, whatever the play asked for; since to us their ministrations would be far from unobtrusive. Here Professor Nicoll offers us a hand. Keen as ever on the classic scent, he wonders how far the Elizabethans may have adopted, and adapted, the devices of the Greeks, as revealed by Vitruvius.¹¹ What is against our supposing that on occasion the curtains of the inner stage parted and a low truck rolled forward, carrying a death-bed or a throne? Nothing, except the instinctive revulsion of

the Methodists from anything that smacks of stage carpentry.

Then there is the matter of the houses. Brought up as we were in the belief that Shakespeare was artist and gentleman enough to leave as much as possible to the imagination, we may be shocked when we discover how literal-minded some of his near predecessors—and contemporaries—were in their demands for the real thing. We do not know how the breach was stormed at Harfleur and how those scaling-ladders were used that the Folio tells of, or how the gates were opened when the Governor surrendered. But in Greene's *Looking Glass* of only eight years earlier the Magi "beat the ground, and from under the same rises a brave arbour": we are reminded of the arbour shewn in the woodcuts of *The Spanish Tragedy* and the "hoopes for tharbour" in the Revels accounts. An arbour high enough for Kyd's Horatio to hang in is clearly in the category of houses, and Greene's arbour, we see, comes up on a trap, just as the Witches' cauldron unmistakably sinks on one. Ophelia's grave is presumably some six feet long: does that mark the limit in size, since the problem involved here is only one of counterweighting? In short, were traps habitually employed for raising houses from the cellarage?

For although we may dispute Dr Hotson's arena, it seems that we must grant him his houses, in public and court shows alike. Moreover, on a stage embraced by an audience on three sides but not four, these houses need not obstruct the general view. Also, if that stage was backed by a curtained recess, the forward-rolling trolley of the Greeks might reinforce the rising table as a means of disclosing large structures when they were needed and withdrawing them when they had served their purpose; this would be no more tricky a matter than the hoisting of Greene's goddess in her chair. The Methodists will murmur that here is an insidious attempt, after all their preaching, to reimpose on their poet the very fetters from which they seek to free him. But let them consider for a moment that still unsolved problem, Cleopatra's monument. Was the dying Antony hoisted to the floor of the upper stage? If so, the upper stage of the reconstructions will not do; it must be brought much closer to the spectator. Or did Cleopatra and her women receive him on the plinth of a monument built for the occasion? If so, this structure either appeared bodily from below or from behind, or was put together on the stage. If the last, when?—for we are assured that a great virtue of the Elizabethans was their regard for continuity of action. Not, of a certainty, during those hushed moments when Antony says farewell to Eros; unless indeed we restore the discarded traverses between the columns

and suppose it set, silently, behind them. Or are we to think of it as there throughout the play, the centerpiece perhaps of a *décor simultané*, scenically embellishing our non-scenic stage? What sort of a box of bricks, we exasperatedly wonder, was this theatre, of which we thought ourselves so sure? Should we, while accepting the Swan drawing as a passable drawing of the Swan, banish it entirely from our minds when we are speculating about the Globe and Fortune?

It is equally a matter for conjecture how the King's Men mounted their plays at the "private", roofed and candle-lit Blackfriars. We may guess that when the Children played *Campaspe* there in Farrant's time they had the palace, studio, tub and what not distributed about their stage, as at court, in a kind of *décor simultané*. We do not know, although it is likely, that they continued to use that method in Burbage's new house some fourteen years later, nor whether the King's Men, when they took possession of it as their winter quarters, also adopted it, perhaps as a workable compromise between the usage of the Globe and of the court stage as it was in the time of James. But here at least there is no evidence to support the notion of an arena. Two small drawings of the period represent the indoor stage as backed by hangings; so does a later one dating from the Commonwealth, when actors furtively played excerpts from their plays under the name of Drolls. What more was there at the Blackfriars? Granville-Barker hazarded, not with everyone's approval, that at the Blackfriars they dabbled in scenery as we understand the term. He had his doubts about the cave in *Cymbeline*.¹² Candle-light is cosy, selective, dramatic; and Barker, a firm believer in the inner stage, seems to have suspected that on the inner stage of the Blackfriars there were experiments sorting ill with the daylit austerity of the Globe. He may have been wrong; the cave that incurred his suspicion may have been nothing more than yet another house, deriving from the mansions of an earlier drama. But by 1610 the King's Men must have been acquainted with the ascendant masque; some of them may have been enlisted for the anti-masque for which amateurs were not competent, and have played amid the scenic wonder of Whitehall. Why should not that infection have caught them? Why indeed, the more rabid of the Methodists might say, seeing that their theatre excluded God's sunlight and fresh air? But if they were so caught there is a discernable line of descent from the Blackfriars to the projected all-purpose theatre for which D'Avenant was to obtain King Charles's patent, and so on to his scenic "operas", given

with the Lord Protector's sanction at Rutland House, and to the stage of the Restoration.

Whether sustainable or not, a heresy so radical as Dr Hotson's is of service, if only because it reminds us how much we have got into the habit of taking for granted and how little we really know. Research will go on, spurred by his challenge, delving ever deeper into the Revels' and Works' accounts and other sources. It might also with advantage delve deeper into the plays, and not only into those of Shakespeare but into all the drama of his time, examining even the least worthy with equal care. It was from the second-rate Pompeii that we learned a great deal of the ways of noble Rome; and a hack of the Elizabethan theatre who relied on every one of its devices may have more to tell us than a poet who had less need of them. And there is no better way to verify our present hypotheses than by using, as has been suggested, a model playhouse and a cast of pawns. Whether the play of our choice be *Antony* or *Macbeth* or *Friar Bacon*—provided only that it is eventful — by the time we have played it through in this fashion, faithfully and shirking nothing, we may discover more than we could in a year of theorising. Needless to say this must be done with an actor's mind at work, if we are to decide what can and cannot be satisfactorily presented on an inner stage with twenty-seven feet of bare boards in front of it.

So much for the practicabilities. But we have also to arrive at some conclusion as to the Elizabethans' notion of actuality in the theatre: what helped to make a play seem real to them, beyond the lines and the playing? It is a long way in miles and years from Bankside to San Francisco's Chinatown, yet the kind of performance to be seen there may throw some light on the problem. Imagine a rather tawdy western stage set with wings and with a commonplace seascape for backcloth. Its only unfamiliar feature is a kind of shop's counter, to the left of the scene, behind which a functionary banks and clashes instruments of percussion, accentuating the points in the dialogue. On such a scene there enter two Admirals in robes of state, each attended by a property man and wearing as head-dress the mast and sails of a war-junk. They exchange tirades with great force and artistry, to the accompaniment of bangs and clashes from behind the counter; next the property men produce pop-guns and they exchange shots. One property man lowers his principal's sail, and the two Admirals stalk off. That is victory and defeat at sea, epically-dramatically rendered, with the fighting perfunctorily symbolised. All the humble,

well-mannered audience asks is magnificence in speech and bearing.

It is conceivable that the presentation of Shakespeare's battle scenes was something half-way between this sea-fight and the Agincourt of the cinema. Flourishes and alarums punctuate the episodes, not the lines. The armies are, as has been said, token armies, but with their banners they make an imposing show; the foils are few, but they are real; the guns that one day are to set the Globe on fire are not pop-guns. No realism in the picture as a whole, then, but plenty in its component parts. All that a player handles must, like the clothes he is wearing, seem like the real thing: thrones and tents unquestionably—what of the gates of Harfleur? On a stage that can at choice be precisely somewhere or nowhere in particular, the doors must open and shut, even slam. Falstaff's chair must be the right chair for Falstaff; moreover, having a real buckbasket, shall we be content if Herne's oak is symbolised by one of the columns of the stage? Hardly; the machinists will see to that. This semi-scenic convention begins to take shape as one perfectly acceptable by a public unused to a proscenium frame; a child having a toy railway does not worry because the nursery floor is not a landscape, he is too busy with the rails and the train.

We have, then, good grounds for believing that the Elizabethan stage was not bare, but on the contrary that it was often elaborately dressed and handsome to the eye. The most we can concede to the Methodists is that its settings were cheap compared with the fully scenic outfit of the Restoration; in fact a writer of that age did so compare it, lamenting the consequent increase in theatre prices. This was not so, however, in the matter of costume. In a time when to be splendidly turned out was almost a mania, the players, largely dependent on the more fashionable public, could not afford to lag behind. Accordingly even the careful Henslowe has to note some hair-raising items. Twenty pounds or so for a cloak is two hundred and more in the money of to-day. The lavish Irving did not use cloth of gold, finding that under the gaslight much cheaper stuff looked better; in the more searching light of day Henslowe did, and it cost him the equivalent of five pounds a yard. Sixteen shillings (say eight pounds) for "copper lace of silver to lace a pair of hose" is another entry. Second hand dresses were often bought from the pawnbroker or were presented by the nobility when the fashion veered. But the players also had their own tailors, who kept abreast of such veerings and exchanged forecasts with others of the trade. A gentleman visit-

ing the playhouse might be chagrined to observe on the head of a boy actress the identical style of hat that he had presented to his lady as the very latest thing.

From such and other evidence we know that the plays were given in the modern dress of the day. Cleopatra's stay-lace and Caesar's doublet, baffling to producers intent on historical accuracy, are further confirmation. But to this rule there were exceptions. The Elizabethan actor adopted the same convention as the Italian painters who were his contemporaries. He attired himself in the garments of his time, appropriately to the part he played and as gorgeously as it permitted. But when the part required it he would enhance his get-up with certain recognisable insignia of the Turk, the Moor or the noble Greek or Roman. Paulo Veronese will at once enlighten us. In him we find an entirely satisfactory harmonising of doublet and hose, an Augustan breastplate such as Inigo Jones was to borrow for his epicene masquing knights, a helmet from Trajan's column and plumage that Essex might have worn if he had come victorious from Ireland; the whole perfectly expressing, when transferred to the theatre, those notions of a heroic age that the Elizabethans imbibed from Plutarch. There is a drawing, believed to represent a scene from *Titus Andronicus*, which seems to support this view.¹³ The figure with the spear, supposably Titus himself, is a Roman as Veronese might have pictured him; one of his attendant halberdiers is Elizabethan; the other, exuberantly bombasted as to his breeches and wearing a scimitar, may embody Veronese's, and our theatre's, idea of costume in the Near East. The kneeling suppliants are Veronese-Roman, the kneeling Tamora is doubtless an Elizabethan queen of tragedy; Aaron the Moor most certainly conforms to the Globe's idea of Moorishness. It is remarkable that the theatre of our time, instead of squandering its resources in pursuit of historical exactitude, is beginning to perceive that what is historically wrong may be aesthetically right; in this matter we are reverting to the custom of Shakespeare's day. Of his Roman plays at least this is true. We are content if they transport us to the ancient world as conceived by Renaissance England, not to the authentic Rome and Alexandria of the first century B.C.

What should a young producer do when, with a powerful syndicate behind him or at worst no drastic compulsion to make ends meet, he confronts a play of Shakespeare? Almost every new way has now been tried. The core of Poel's doctrine was taken over by Granville-Barker: it was continuous action

and a light, neat stressing of the word that most mattered in every line. Reinforced by scenery that somehow was not entirely scenic and a realism that was not pedestrianly real, it took London by storm. A war intervened, commandeering young actors, sending up costs and rentals and admitting to control of the theatre base speculators who saw in it a means of making easy money when things went well and of evading taxation, by juggling with their losses, when they did not. Barker, understandably, left the stage to dree its weird. But he also left behind him the breach in tradition that he had made, and through that breach unorthodoxy, having no creed or code, came sprawling in. We hailed the fastidious Shakespeare as a democrat careless of degree, and Lady Macbeth gave the wrong hand, the wrong side up, to royalty. We played him in clothes of our day as an acknowledgment that he was for all time, only to discover that the liberality of plus-fours is not enough when the words call for a stance and gesture that Michel-Angelo might have thought worth his recording. We have had our fun with the gentle little *Dream*, tossing it from Mendelssohn to Purcell and back again, with period trimmings to match, and we have tethered two of Shakespeare's jolliest lovers to the bed of a drunken tinker.¹⁴ We have not yet put *Henry V* on ice, but we may. In short, our young producer may soon be sighing for those limitations within which, as we told, genius most happily fulfils itself.

Certain discoveries he is already making. Once a convention is abolished it can be painstakingly restored, but never to full life: we cannot restore the audience of the Globe. If we set out to give the whole of Shakespeare on the most convincing reconstruction of his stage yet known, we shall find before we are half-way through the canon that our public are getting bored with it, much more bored than people ever were with the scenery at the Lyceum or at His Majesty's. The vast and curtainless setting that some prefer does not always speed the action; it takes a confoundedly long time to get one's people on and off, and when much blood has been spilt the ceremonious removing of bodies may become wearisome. Not everything was wrong in the days when the dead lay still until they heard the tumbler thump the boards, and then upped and ran for dear life.

Chapter 19

The Two Hours' Traffic

THE GENERAL CIRCUMSTANCES and conduct of an Elizabethan stage performance are too well known to need more than a summary here. The play was announced by enticingly worded bills which were posted in the neighbourhood of the theatre and, with or without the authorities' consent, about the City. The playing hour was between two and three, not so early for a populace whose day began at sunrise and who dined at noon or before. In course of time they played later; in 1603 a Puritan complains of "nocturnall and night Playes"¹ at the private houses, which did not depend on daylight. To the Middlesex theatres one went on foot, on horseback or by coach, when that Dutch invention came into use; to the Bank-side the most convenient way was by boat, for all who dwelt upstream of London Bridge. It was a notable industry, this ferrying to and from the theatres on the Surrey side, and there was an outcry from the watermen when Alleyn built the Fortune north of the Thames.

At the Globe one paid a penny (say tenpence for us) at the door for admission to the seatless "yard". For accommodation in the tiers one might pay as much as two shillings. Access to the stage seats and the Lord's Room would seem to have been by the stage door. There was no advance booking, but a place could be reserved by sending a servant to occupy it as soon as the house opened.

The performance was heralded by three trumpet calls, no doubt as stirring as the flourishes at Bayreuth. Awaiting them, a seething house passed the time in chatter, eating, drinking, card-playing, dicing, wench-spotting and pocket-picking; cat-calls and the cries of beer-sellers and applewomen pierced the general babel. As to behaviour when the black-robed Prologue appeared and the show began, there is conflicting evidence. There were, as we have seen, occasional shindies at The Theatre, and the Red Bull was reputed a rough house. In 1608 Dekker satirically counselled his Gull how best to make a nuisance of himself in the stage seats, to wit by coming late and leaving early, by smoking, by interrupting, by laughing and yawning at well chosen moments and by tickling the

players with a rush picked up from the boards.² Yet in 1617, a year after Shakespeare's death, an Italian visitor remarks on an audience of almost princely quality, "listening as silently and soberly as possible".³ If uproar had been the invariable accompaniment of a play, the poets of that time would not have ventured as they do into the quieter regions of the heart. For all that, we remember how *Faustus* is interspersed with fooleries, and how the intervals and end of every play gave the signal for the clown, whose decline in Shakespeare's hands we have also observed. It may be that the spectators who so impressed Busino by their demeanour had been schooled by a long succession of masterpieces. But we are fairly safe in assuming that in the nineties of the sixteenth century the audience was an unruly animal, and that the player's first business was to charm and tame it. Reconstructors should bear this in mind: what would have been likely to happen if at a crucial moment a large number of such an audience found that they could not see?

But Dekker's ill-behaved gallant, clearly a composite portrait, reminds us of a practice that would be as intolerable to us now as it would have been inexplicable then, but for the money it brought in. It was the practice of admitting the profane, whether noble or merely wealthy, to the boards that should have been consecrated to theatre magic. We were to endure it in this country until Garrick made an end of it; in France they put up with it until a public-spirited nobleman guaranteed the *Française* against any loss that might ensue from its abolition. Some years before, Mlle Dumesnil had been spanked on the stage by an honest general whom, at such close quarters, she had over-excited; she took the assault as a high compliment and afterwards thanked him. But Burbage dealt in another kind of drama, in which rhetoric and colloquialisms were most unclassically blended; he had to adjust his technique to this encirclement. In one respect the arrangement may have been even a help, for an aside projected across the footlights is one thing, and quite another if addressed to a spectator at one's elbow.

After the show, when the takings had been divided according to their respective shares, the actors of the Globe might sup at the adjacent Cardinal's Hat or, as everyone knows, at the Mermaid Tavern in Bread Street, Cheapside. The Devil, at Temple Bar, was a later haunt; the name is not necessarily emblematic of this drama's decadence. No one need either dissipate nor intensify the pleasant fog of senti-

ment that has hung about the Mermaid ever since Beaumont wrote to Jonson

What things have we seen
Done at the Mermaid? heard words that have been
So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
As if that every one from whence they came
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
And had resolved to live a fool the rest
Of his dull life. . . .

Any memembr of any club that cherishes the art of conversation knows that such things can still be seen and still, in some measure, heard. But here were colossal minds not only warmed by wine but positively drunk with the heady English they themselves were there and then distilling: a truly god-like inebriety. These interpreters and impersonators of mankind at its noblest and vilest, its silliest and most lovable, tasted a strange freedom under Tudor rule. Occasional jealousies and rumpuses apart, they were a friendly little clique, calling each other by their christian names as theatre people still do; for an aristocracy aware of its own importance can afford such familiarities. Thomas Heywood was one of their circle, and thus he summed them up:

Marlowe, renowned for his rare art and wit,
Could ne'er attain beyond the name of *Kit*. . . .
Excellent Beaumont, in the foremost rank
Of the rarest wits, was never more than *Frank*.
Mellifluous Shakespeare, whose enchanting quill
Commanded mirth or passion, was but *Will*;
And famous Jonson, though his learned pen
Be dipped in Castaly, is still but *Ben*.
Fletcher and Webster, of that learned pack
None of the mean'st—yet neither was but *Jack*.

And so on: the Mermaid was an excellent club.

Chapter 20

The Masque

MASQUE WAS NOT theatre. It was a development of the Disguising, which in turn was a courtly variant of the Mummers' show. *Momme* is a mask, and Chambers suggests that the name derives from much earlier celebrations in which the mask was the skull of a votive offering and the accompanying torch a brand from the ceremonial fire. Masquing was still called Mumming when at Candlemas in 1377 certain citizens, vizarded and in fancy dress, rode out with musicians and linkmen to greet the Black Prince's son at Kennington. When Henry and his shepherds broke in on Wolsey's supper it was known as a Disguising. By Elizabeth's day it was the Masque, and in her thrifty court it was still a simple affair, unless there was an envoy to astonish or a loyal subject who footed the bill. Under James it assumed unparalleled magnificence; the average cost has been estimated at two thousand pounds in money of that time, with fifty pounds apiece for Jonson as librettist and Inigo Jones as designer.

It was usually a *pièce d'occasion*, not intended for repetition; the stage directions are in the past tense, saying not what is to be done, but what was done. Its purpose was to compliment the sovereign and his consort and their guests, and at the same time to exhibit as advantageously as might be those ladies and gentlemen of the court who could be relied on for grace of bearing, movement and speech. Royalty itself took part; in one memorable masque at least the King designed to be lowered from the clouds in a machine. Little was called for in the way of acting; for such acting as was needed professional talent could be called in.

Surprisingly, the foremost exponent of this complaisant art was the rough and tough Ben Jonson; he justified himself by making it an art indeed. Yet not true theatre art. His verse ennobled it and his adroit hand contrived for it a quasi-dramatic shaping, particularly by means of the contrasting ante-masque (also called anti-masque) in which it was generally paid actors who paved the way for the entry of the amateurs and for the scenic effects which, from wholeheartedly admiring, Jonson came to loathe. But he had tied

himself to an essentially, for him, meretricious form in which the only illusion seriously aimed at was of a scenic nature. To a self-sufficing designer like Jones there could be no form more congenial; and we are obliged to take note of the Masque in these pages because it was from the fruits of his invention and craftsmanship that the Jacobean theatre began to acquire the notion of a picture stage.

Inigo Jones started in life as a joiner's apprentice, but he had the good fortune to come under the patronage of the third Earl of Pembroke. He studied in Italy and on his return in 1603, being then thirty, he was appointed to the household of Prince Henry; it was in his quality of architect that he was given sole charge of the court Masques. At that time they were emerging from a period of transition. Gone already were the elaborate wheeled structures that had rolled into the assembly laden with living allegory, and Jones soon bettered the French device of stationary groves and grottos dispersedly placed in the manner of the medieval mansions. His eventual arrangement of the hall was not the same as for a play in Elizabeth's time. More than one third of it was assigned to the stage and its spectacle, and confronting the stage was the royal dais, surrounded on three sides by tiers of seats. Between stage and dais there extended a central area, usually green-carpeted. This was the dance-floor, across which also the personages of the masque, abstract or mythological, could advance and pay homage on the steps of the throne. Such a combination of stage and arena recalled the playhouse of the Greeks. Still more, since the stage was scenic, did it anticipate Astley's Amphitheatre.

It has been surmised that Burbage knew something of the Teatro Olimpico; but this, and other wonders, Jones must have seen. He had studied Vitruvius, directly or through Serlio's *Architettura*; he knew the fixed Serlian settings for three styles of play, and the *décor simultané*. He was familiar also with the Italian devices for changing scenes. There was the *scena ductilis*, a semi-permanent setting in which panels (flats, we were one day to call them) were drawn off-stage, disclosing a new background. There were the three systems of Sabbatini for changing what we now know as the wings. According to one, the framing was double-canvassed, and when the outer canvas was stripped the inner was exposed. According to the second, one piece slid bodily away, revealing another. The third was adapted from the Greek *periaktoi*. Each piece was three-sided, like a prism, and revolved on its own axis; a setting composed of such pieces could be changed

not once but twice, in the twinkling of an eye. Jones knew moreover with what scarcely credible ingenuity the Italians were at work on stage effects, drawing equally on their gleanings from Vitruvius and on what they remembered of the artifices of the *Maître des Feintes*: moving clouds, transparencies, visions, sky-borne chariots, earthquakes, shipwrecks and heaving seas. There were conflagrations, which these care-free enthusiasts brought to perfection by soaking their *periaktoi* in brandy and setting them on fire, and whirling them round; in recommending this contrivance Sabbatini adds a word of caution. But a conflagration is a poor thing without the aid of darkness; darkness is a friend to artificial lighting, controllable lighting; and this strange alliance the Italians set themselves to bring about. For they not only coloured their stage lighting, which was easy, but they projected it, hanging a flask of water, a natural lens, before the flame of olive oil. It was a very old trick; you may (or should) still see Hans Sachs using it at Covent Garden, when he works far into the night to finish Eva's shoes.

But of all the developments that this lucky young man had the privilege of observing during his sojourn in Italy there was none more significant than that of the proscenium. He must have been struck by the picture-framing possibilities of the great central arch of the Olimpico, as were the Italian designers. No permanent theatre expanded that picture-frame to the dimensions of a true proscenium until the Farnese did so, fifteen years after Jones had got to work in England.¹ Yet the proscenium notion was clearly implanted in his mind, for we find him adopting it within a very short time of being called to the enviable task of planning stage after stage, with the Revels Office financing his experiments.

Our main sources of information are his drawings, in the Chatsworth collection and elsewhere, and the texts, with full descriptions of the scenic marvels, which poet and designer were permitted to publish when the show was over. A few of these suffice to illustrate the evolution of his art. In Samuel Daniel's *Vision of Twelve Goddesses* (1604) the dispersed setting had been employed for the last time at court, the hall being "so much lessened by the workes that were in it" as to limit the number of spectators. In four plays given before a somnolent monarch at Oxford in 1605 Jones combined the raking stage of Serlio with a background that could be changed by means of *periaktoi*; the success of this device was disputed. In *The Masque of Blackness* of the same year there was a "landschap" painted on a curtain which fell, not rose,

revealing a moving sea, and we may infer that it was framed by a proscenium. In *The Hue and Cry After Cupid*, composed in honour of the wedding of Lord Haddington in 1608, a note of pilasters and allegorical figures "in place of the arch" confirms that a proscenium was used, and of full-stage dimensions, since a transformation later displayed "an illustrious concave, filled with an ample and glistering light, in which an artificial sphere was made of silver, eighteen foot in the diameter, that turned perpetually": we remind ourselves that this was about the year of *Coriolanus*. For *Albion's Triumph* (1609) a design is extant shewing what is called the frontispiece; it is a proscenium, and a very handsome one.²

From now on his progress was triumphal, interrupted only by another visit to Italy in 1613 (no doubt he came back full of fresh inventions) and his labours on the Whitehall banqueting-house during 1619-22. As artifice followed artifice, each proclaiming ever more arrogantly that the eye mattered more than the ear, it is small wonder that Jonson became restive, and that at last he severed the uneasy partnership with an all-round damning of "mythology, there painted on slit deal", the "mere perspective of an inch-board" and a "money-got, mechanic age"; painting and carpentry, cries the angry poet, are the soul of masque.³ But slit deal and inch-board sound remarkably like the profile and three-by-one of the nineteenth-century theatre; and how much that institution was to owe to Inigo Jones before the lamps of Whitehall were extinguished we may learn from his *Floriméne* of 1635 and his *Salmacida Spolia* of 1640.⁴

To *Floriméne* two Italian systems contribute. The side-pieces, set in sharp perspective, derive from Serlio; the background, with its sliding flats, from the *scena ductilis*. Jones's instructions to his pupil and assistant John Webb make mention of "but one standing scene", adding that "the scene changes only at the back shutters". This then is something not unlike the fixed setting that Serlio devised for pastorals, the only considerable difference being that the background can be changed. The changes are made by the opening and closing of flats, here called shutters, running in grooves above and below them. Such flats, running in such grooves, were to persist on our stage for two hundred years and more.

Salmacida Spolia, the swan-song of Caroline masque, calls for more detailed attention. Here the groove system is made to serve the wings as well. On each side of the stage there are sixteen grooves, arranged in groups of four; in each groove a wing slides on and off. Again we have the Serlian perspective:

the proscenium columns are thirty-five feet apart, the wings of the first group, when set, thirty-one and a half, the wings of the fourth group fourteen. There is a similar diminution in height: the proscenium opening is thirty feet high, the wings of the first group are twenty-six, the wings of the fourth group fifteen. There is a barely perceptible upward rake in the stage floor, enough perhaps to enable the King to see its surface. For a court designer plotted his perspective for the royal eye; by the same token we need not be puzzled because the grooves were little more than twice as long as the wings were wide. Evidently spectators in the side seats could see the edge of a wing even after it had been withdrawn; but Charles and his immediate entourage could not.

Twenty inches up-stage of the fourth wing-grooves are the long grooves carrying the flats that are to back the scenes. There are four of these. Each flat is fourteen feet high and eight in width. A pair of flats, meeting in the centre, are together just broad enough to mask the fourteen-foot gap between the wings of the fourth group on either side. The four grooves that carry these flats extended across the stage, and are forty feet long.

Above each group of wing-grooves there is an exactly corresponding group of upper grooves; these engage the tops of the wings and steady them. Above the four long grooves that carry the flats there are four exactly corresponding grooves that engage the tops of the flats and steady them. Still higher, running vertically downward from the topmost framing of the stage, we discern yet more grooves; guided by these the "cloudings" close in, masking the upper grooves and topping the scene.

Here then, and before we examine this staging any further, we find provision made for four full sets, each thirty-six feet wide and about twenty deep, and changeable within the space of a few seconds. But the climax of *Salmacida Spolia* was the opening of the clouds and the disclosing of "the whole heaven"; it was not too pretentious a claim. Behind the grooves of the backing flats Jones and Webb had some ten feet of stage-depth to play with, allowing for passage-way behind the scenery. Leaving two feet for this purpose, they erected a framed sky-cloth thirty-six feet square. Forty inches forward of it two massive stanchions rose from the floor of the hall through the stage to the uppermost framing; they were nearly fifty feet high and twenty-two feet apart; their inward faces were slotted, and the slots were no doubt as carefully soaped as the grooves of the wings and flats, for they

were to serve as the guides of a lift. The visible aspect of this lift was a two-tiered bank of cloud supporting thirteen persons; suitably counterweighted, it raised them roof-high to await their cue, and then slowly descended.⁵ Cloudings still masked the upper wing-grooves, and a strip of cloud was needed to hide the cross-beam that carried the upper grooves of the flats; we have to guess through what gauzes the vision was first seen. But this was at a point well above the ceiling level of an ordinary modern setting, for Jones had no gallery to think of and could plan steep sight-lines. To Charles's court, looking their last on such wonders, it must have seemed as though the heavens were opening over their heads. Of one thing we can be certain: whatever means were employed, to the eyes that beheld it the spectacle was a blaze of light. Soft light, doubtless; but to be convinced on this point we need only reflect how brilliant a candle-lit room can be, and what pertinacious devils those Italians were, and whether Jones was the man to display such magic without taking care that it should be seen.⁶

It is easy to understand Ben Jonson's wrath. Yet was it entirely base to squander all this invention on the pursuit of visual beauty for one night only? For the Masque meant little to the people at large, free as they were to buy the book and read about it afterwards. It was the court, exclusive; among those on the fringe of the court the scramble for invitations was as fierce as the officials were arbitrary; city matrons, it was said, would barter their virtue for a seat. Nor were their betters particularly well-behaved; scandal was caused by the rush for the supper-table when all was over. Charles and his French consort imposed their own standards of propriety, but James's court was ill-mannered and greatly given to drink. Not always, when the night came, were ladies about the throne in a fit state to be hoisted in Mr Jones's machines, or to speak Mr Jonson's lines. It is not recorded that either Jones or Jonson were concerned in the affair of *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, given in honour of King Christian of Denmark at the palace of Theobalds in 1606.⁷ Sir John Harrington's account of it is well known; often thrust into the decent obscurity of an appendix, it is too racy to be so treated here.

Harrington rather wistfully contrasts the new ways with the old, and with reason.⁸ It seems that the lady who played the Queen, on presenting gifts of wine, cream and jelly to both majesties, "forgot" the steps leading to the dais and fell prone, casting her offerings on the Danish prince. He, after being

rubbed down with napkins, rose to dance with her, but himself fell, and was laid on a bed of state in an inner chamber "which was not a little defiled with the presents of the Queen. . . . The entertainment and show went forward, and most of the presenters went backward, or fell down; wine did so occupy their upper chambers. Now did appear, in rich dress, Hope, Faith and Charity: Hope did assay to speak, but wine rendered her endeavours so feeble that she withdrew, hoping that the King would excuse her brevity: Faith . . . left the court in a staggering condition: Charity came to the King's feet, and seemed to cover the multitude of sins her sisters had committed; in some sort she made obeysance and brought giftes, but said she would return home again, as there was no gift which heaven had not already given his Majesty. She then turned to Hope and Faith, who were both sick and spewing in the lower hall. Next came Victory, in bright armour, and presented a rich sword to the King, who did not accept it, but put it by with his hand; and, by a strange medley of versification, did endeavour to make suit to the King. But Victory did not triumph long; for, after much lamentable utterance, she was led away like a silly captive, and laid to sleep in (*sic*) the outer steps of the antichamber. Now did Peace make entry, and strive to get foremoste to the King; but I grieve to tell how much great wrath she did discover unto those of her attendants; and, much contrary to her semblance, most rudely made war with her olive branch, and laid on the pates of those who did oppose her coming".

A discordant quotation, perhaps, with which to end this note on an adventurous art that in its hey-day came near to eclipsing the true drama. It was not in such circumstances, we may be sure, that the near-masque of *Endymion* exhaled its breath of lavender; certainly not thus were *Floriméne* and its superb successor played. But those stage directions of Jonson leave us guessing. They profess to recount what was done. Are they in fact statements, agreed on after the show by Jonson and Jones, of what it was intended should be done? Were there, sometimes, disasters? Mechanical hitches apart, how often were drunken amateurs replaced, at the very moment of going on, by sober professionals? We can never know, until we unearth a court diarist of that time who is as gleefully candid as Sir John Harrington; and even he could only tell us what he observed on his side of the curtain.

There are several reasons why this book cannot neglect the Masque. First, from the "landschap" of *The Masque of Blackness* to the apocalypse of *Salmacida Spolia*, the Masque was

incessantly luring the theatre on toward the enfranchisement, and fetters, of a scenic drama. The theatre could not afford the splendour of the Masque, but it could not withstand its incitements. If the records are to be relied on, Shakespeare had still five years to live when Alonzo's galleon foundered in a scenic sea. From that decisive moment we can trace the story, gaily or glumly according to our several dispositions, to a memorable night nearly three hundred years later when an officer and gentleman, being in financial difficulties, crept along the footboard of a moving train and uncoupled a horse-box containing an animal against which he had staked his all.⁹ Secondly, Harrington's comment throws a sidelight on the harsh laughter, the desperate facing of evil, that characterise contemporary plays; the creatures who fell about and spewed at Theobalds had recently seen, or were shortly to see, *King Lear*. Thirdly, the extravagance of the Masque put a weapon in the hands of the Puritans, which, when the time came to strike, they used against the court's other plaything, the stage.

Chapter 21

Ben Jonson

IN ONE RESPECT the Masque was fortunate; the Civil War killed it in its prime. The court of Charles II could not afford to revive it, the few attempts that were made were half-hearted and did not succeed, and its traditions and devices passed to the playhouse of the Restoration. Now we must take up the tale of the drama where we left it, in the days of the Globe's supremacy.

To many of the men who were writing in Shakespeare's time only scant attention can be given, if this book is to maintain due proportion.¹ Henslowe's diary is one source from which we learn of several who might have ranked higher if their plays had survived. Time has dealt hardly with them; so, in the eighteenth century, did Mr Warburton's cook Betsy, who methodically rifled that scholar's hoard of priceless manuscripts to light her kitchen fire. Multiple authorship, a very usual practice then, is not kind to the lesser writer's fame; in a collaboration it is the more celebrated partner who gets the credit. Henry Chettle (c. 1560–1607), working in the main with Dekker, but also with Day, Drayton, Jonson, Munday and others, helped to produce in this fashion some forty-three plays for the Admiral's Men and five for Worcester's. Many are lost, but *Patient Grissel* (1600) is extant: the heroine is Chaucer's Griselda. Another survivor is *Hoffman*, or *A Revenge for a Father* (c. 1603), noted by Henslowe as "a Danysh tragedy" and having some affinity with *Hamlet*; of this play Chettle is conceded the sole authorship. The hand of Robert Daborne (d. 1628) has been traced in certain works of Beaumont and Fletcher. Samuel Daniel (1563–1619) has a *Cleopatra* and a *Philotas* in the classical manner and a *Queens' Arcadia* and *Hymen's Triumph* in the pastoral; he was moreover a graceful writer of masques, ranking second only to Jonson, who succeeded him as Poet Laureate.

Not all the men in this summary are remembered for their plays alone. John Day (c. 1574–c. 1640) has to his credit *The Parliament of Bees*, as charming a specimen of Elizabethan light verse as any to be found, facile, copious and gay. Of his

dramatic works *The Isle of Gulls* and *Humour Out of Breath* are neat and vivacious romances that might still respond to sympathetic handling; in the latter his self-willed Florimel is a darling, as some young actress may yet discover if in our quest for revivable stuff we do not disdain the by-ways; no doubt the Children of the King's Revels did justice to it and to her. Michael Drayton (c. 1563–1631) appears as part author of twenty-three plays, most of them lost, for the Admiral's Men, and has been assigned the chief hand in the extant *Sir John Oldcastle*, Chettle, Munday and Wilson assisting. Nathan Field's *A Woman is a Weathercock* is farcical comedy, salacious and second-rate but, as we should expect from Field, excellent actor's stuff; the same may be said of his *Amends for Ladies*. William Haughton (c. 1575–1605) was another industrious collaborator whose personal contributions cannot now be assessed. The Robin Hood plays of the versatile Anthony Munday (c. 1553–1633) have already been noted; in these he was helped by Chettle. Henry Porter's *Two Angry Women of Abingdon* (c. 1598) is in the descent of *Gammer Gurtons' Needle*, but for rustic comedy Lamb ranks him with Shakespeare. Samuel Rowley (d. 1624) of the Admiral's and Prince's Men, is most remembered as dramatist for his "Chronicle Historie" of Henry VIII, bearing the cryptic title *When You See Me You Know Me* (c. 1604); this also we have glanced at.

A more considerable Rowley was William (c. 1585– c. 1626) of the Duke of York's Men, whose inventions amplify the main action of Middleton. In these he shews something higher than a journeyman's skill. Writing for himself he is robust, many-sided and strong in theatre-sense. He can turn his hand to anything: to domestic comedy in *A New Wonder*, *A Woman Never Vexed*; to the tragedy of passion in *All's Lost by Lust*; to farce in *A Match at Midnight* ² and to a vein not easily classified yet, though one day to become familiar, in *A Shoemaker a Gentleman*. The title-page of his *Birth of Merlin*, already remarked on, brackets him with Shakespeare as joint author; but this is universally contested to-day. He seems to have been careless of literary fame. Of these plays, which appeared on the stage from about 1608 onward, not one was printed until six years after his death, and *Merlin* did not reach the reading public for another fifteen. He was an all-round man of the theatre, and might have stood higher in our estimation if Thomas Heywood had not outclassed him in the same sphere.

Against this briefly sketched background we can now proceed to consider the more eminent of Shakespeare's contemporaries and near successors. Ben Jonson claims first place and moreover has been recently in our minds; so let us begin with him.³

A good minor card for the heretics to play is to contrast the nebulousness, the elusiveness, of Shakespeare the man with the almost palpable presence of Jonson. If as these words are read we could be transported to the Mermaid, we should be pleased but not surprised to learn that Jonson had just come in, and sorry but not at all surprised if we were told that Shakespeare had at that very moment slipped out. It is the same with the men's voices. Without much exercise of imagination we can hear Jonson's; it is far less easy to hear Shakespeare's. That may be because Shakespeare is one of the perfect dramatists who keep themselves out of their plays; Jonson, like Shaw, is one of the imperfect dramatists who cannot refrain from butting in. Another good card for the heretics is to compare the lifeless mask of the Droeshout engraving with the best-known portrait of Jonson. This is on the very point of speech. It shews a vitality almost semitic—it would do for Meredith's Alvan; not Olympian, and far from serene; titanic and stormy. Certainly of the two careers Jonson's was the more chequered. The young Shakespeare may or may not have spent a night in the village lock-up; Jonson was four times in gaol, once on a charge of homicide and thrice for his share in plays that affronted authority: it is said that on the last occasion he voluntarily shared the fate of his offending comrades. Measured by quantity his output was much the greater of the two; he left behind him fifty-five plays, masques and other entertainments, some three hundred poems of every kind and length, including translations from the Latin, a book of aphorisms and an English grammar: to those we may add his share in the plays of which he was part author and many unpublished works that were destroyed by fire. His story is one of fierce industry, combativeness, generosity; of an esurient relish for the good things of life and an uncompromising pursuit of fineness in things of the mind.

He was born, eight years after Shakespeare, in 1572, a posthumous child. His father was a protestant minister of Scottish extraction who had suffered in the reign of Mary; his stepfather was a master-bricklayer. From a private school he proceeded to Westminster, where Camden, at that time second in command, paid for him and taught him his classics. An exhibition at St John's Cambridge, followed; but the ad-

ditional money he needed was not forthcoming, and within a short while he was back in London, laying bricks. This proved intolerable, and he went soldiering in the Low Countries. Here it seems that he acquitted himself in a manner that did not disgrace the profession of arms. Here also he first fell in, perhaps, with Captain Bobadil; although in those days of the Netherlands wars a seedy braggart was a common object of the London scene. At all events we know that by the age of twenty-five he had found his way to the theatre. Once again the invaluable Henslowe comes to our aid, for on July 28th, 1597, he lent Jonson four pounds and made a note of the loan.

Chambers inclines to the belief that Jonson used the money to buy a share in Lord Pembroke's Men. He was at any rate concerned in their unlucky *Isle of Dogs*,⁴ and on that same day he was among those who were thrown into the Marshalsea. It is likewise possible that Henslowe in making the advance was following his usual practice of establishing what we now call a lien on a young writer of promise. If that was so, no exclusive agreement can have been attached to it—or did the budding poet, on his release, shew an unforeseen independance of spirit? For it was not the Admiral's Men but the Lord Chamberlain's who in the next year were playing *Every Man in His Humour*, with Shakespeare himself in the cast. From that moment Jonson was in a position to which poor Greene must often have aspired. He was a free-lance in the mode, with wind and tide in his favour. He had not, as Greene had, courted theatre ways; he had imposed his ways on the theatre. Yet it is not an irrelevant comment that, from Greene's day to Jonson's, Shakespeare was unobtrusively doing both these things.

Every Man in His Humour set Jonson on his feet; but in the same autumn came the fatal affray with Gabriel Spencer in Hoxton Fields, and he found himself in prison again; he eluded a capital sentence by pleading benefit of clergy, which was still an agreed subterfuge for literary men in trouble of that kind, and emerged with a clean slate and a branded thumb. There followed *Every Man Out of His Humour*, described as a "comicall satyre". In *Cynthia's Revels*, played by the Children at Blackfriars c. 1601, Jonson's eye for types aroused the suspicion of Dekker and Marston that his satire was directed against them, and the Battle of the Poets, as it was called, ensued. They responded with *Satiromastix, or The Untrussing of the Humorous Poet*, which Jonson, writing in an uncongenial hurry, anticipated with *The Poetaster, or the*

Arraignment. The Children of Paul's and of the Chapel were engaged in this wordy warfare, no doubt planting the darts with precocious skill and benefiting greatly by the experience. We may wonder what these poets were up to, quarrelling among themselves when their true business was with our still evolving drama; nevertheless in the course of these harmless mutual thwackings they were led to a clearer conception of what a play ought to be; for in the world of make-believe bad doctrine can be discarded without shedding blood. Meanwhile Shakespeare, in no doubt now what he was after, made a faintly derisive gesture to the little eyases of Blackfriars and proceeded on his way.

The battle subsided without enduring ill-will on either side. After writing up the part of Heironimo for Alleyn Jonson embarked on his first tragedy. *Sejanus* appeared in 1603, manifestly the work of a man who knew his Rome better than the author of *Julius Caesar*. It failed, and Jonson had to rebut the charge that in it he had inclined to popery; it was a fantastic charge, but behind it there may have been the resentment of certain gentlemen favoured by the new King, for *Sejanus* is unsparing of courtly sycophants. But Anne of Denmark delighted in shows no less than her royal husband. On her way south in this year of James's accession Sir Robert Spencer, soon to become Lord Spencer, had staged for her entertainment at Althorpe a great affair of which one feature was Jonson's first full masque, *The Satyr*.⁵ This proved to be the introduction to his long and brilliant term of employment at Whitehall.

Having a fluent pen, a teeming invention and a scholarship that had every figure of pagan legend at its beck and call, he was ideally fitted for the task. His compliments to the sovereign are lavish but never servile; here is a poet who cannot cringe, but who prides himself on his bow. He has the honour to present to Majesty certain divinities of the antique world who have long been intimately known to him; how intimately will appear in the felicity of his allusions and in the footnotes with which he will later enrich the printed text. Homage from Jonson, Majesty must deign to acknowledge, is homage from learning. Yet Learing could unbend and frolic. In Althorpe Park a satyr leaped from a tree and confronted Anne and her son, and he and the swarm of fairies who came tripping over the turf spoke jingling lyrics in the metre of *L'Allegro*. In the great masques that followed it was always a personage of fitting dignity who made formal obeisance to the throne. But the device of the anti-masque enabled Jonson

to people the scene at will with creatures of his fancy, usually of a most uncourtly kind, and a show of stately purport was often very funny too. The flow of appropriate verse is un-failing; lively verse, graceful, firm and clear. It does not—why should it?—stir the heart as great poetry can do. Queen Mab at Althorpe has nothing to say that ranks with Anne Page's address to her elves in Windsor Forest, nor will we find anywhere such throbbing lines as those in which Milton's Comus invokes the night. Yet it can hardly have been of the masques that Jonsons' editor was thinking when he pronounced him the most signal example in literature of power without charm.

Neither is Herford's judgment true of the man himself. If he was what is called a good hater, he was also a good mixer. He clearly was loved and revered by the poets of his circle and, like Shakespeare, enjoyed the friendship of "divers of worship". He was clubbable; a pillar of the Mermaid, he also founded the Apollo, at the sign of The Devil, by Temple Bar. Although he had a virtuous shrew for a wife he was no misogynist, for the exemplary rules of the Apollo permit each member to bring the girl of his choice. Poet Laureate from Daniel's death in 1619 until his own in 1637, he spent his declining years in royal favour and in a security qualified only by the kind of perpetual hardupness that the provident and over-sober never understand, for wine was expensive, and so was hospitality. They were years of increasing sickness, during which his sense of humour did not desert him. His death was mourned as betokening the end of an age. The stone that lies above him in the Abbey bears no florid tribute; his friends were content to call him rare.⁶ For a man devoid of charm, it is not an epithet one would choose.

The notion that Jonson was a disagreeable person took shape in later years. It stemmed in great part from the revelations of a Scottish laird and poet, William Drummond of Hawthornden. In 1619 Jonson tramped to Edinburgh, where he was admitted an honorary burgher and was feasted on a royal scale. After a round of visits he spent some weeks at Hawthornden, and there discoursed with his accustomed freedom about himself, the art of letters and his friends. Drummond took notes, and after many years they were published. What they record is studio-talk of a downrightness shocking to many good people who do not know how cheerfully the most warm-hearted of artists will flay a fellow artist in private, and when wine has loosened his tongue. Many accused Drummond of indiscretion or worse, although we would not

be without these notes to-day; still more of us could not forgive Jonson for presuming to assert, among other aggressive judgments, that the immortal Shakespeare "lacked art". It was forgotten that others were to share this view, and that even Dryden held it for a time. But it was remembered that according to one report Shakespeare had helped Jonson to his first success with the Lord Chamberlain's Men; was it not a very uncharming mixture of ingratitude and jealousy that prompted this maligning of a dead friend?

Such dark surmises were the worst possible aid to a just estimate of his plays, for in the gayest of them there is a harshness that we might easily ascribe to a rancorous disposition in the writer. The display of power is at times almost oppressive; in the strict sense of the word there is charm also, for *Volpone* can still hold an audience spellbound; but that is not the kind of charm that Herford meant. In his comedies Jonson's concern is with human frailty, in his tragedies with human wickedness. There is little here of Shakespeare's delight in men and women as they are, or of his quest for wisdom in the heart of folly and the soul of goodness in things evil. For Jonson a fool is a fool and a knave is a knave, and both must be stripped and thrashed before the play ends. His characters compel our respect, our laughter or our loathing, seldom if ever our love. We cannot freely take sides for or against them, because Jonson has already determined for us which side we are to take: it is *his* side. They live, if galvanised solidity is life, but they do not grow, or discover themselves; if they are right they prove themselves right, and if they are wrong they are exposed and punished. When *Volpone* is brought low it is from no flight of the spirit; he is trodden underfoot as vermin; and so are the lesser rogues, and their gulls, in this phosphorescent masterpiece. For that the play has its own kind of radiance nobody will deny. It coruscates with lines of imperishable strength and beauty. As often as you go to *Volpone* you will hear people catch their breath at

A diamond, would have bought Lollia Paulina,
When she came in like starlight, hid with jewels,
That were the spoils of provinces . . .

Only when that magic sequence has faded from your hearing are you likely to recall two kindred lines of Marlowe:

O thou art fairer than the evening air
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars . . .

But are they indeed kindred lines? Helen is lovelier than a starlit sky; Lollia is *like* starlight because she is so bedizened with gems that she herself cannot be seen. Stripped of the music, is this a very charming idea? No doubt it is, to the earthbound Volpone; but what of his creator? For whenever anyone questions whether Jonson would really soar, someone else is sure to produce that famous simile as evidence that he could. In whose heart did he conceive it: his puppet's or his own?

To say, as has been said, that Jonson's verse is one thing and his drama another is to forget that he flourished in a time when the lyric art and the mimetic art had not yet parted company—which in fact they never have done entirely and never will. Moreover in all English letters it would be hard to find a character more integrated, more positive, less self-doubting; whatever he put his hand to, he could be nothing but his own ebullient, scholarly and honest self. So if in any respect he falls short as a poet, we are likely to find that in the same respect he falls short as a writer of plays.

As a poet he has been ranked with Marlowe. But of the lines just quoted Marlowe's are an exhalation, Jonson's a superb stroke of art. Marlowe-Faustus is lost in contemplation of the most beautiful woman in the world, Jonson-Volpone in the contemplation of a precious stone, and by way of pricing it he evokes the image of an overdressed courtesan. In this well-worn comparison of two poets at their highest power Marlowe may truly be said to mount toward the stars; Jonson, with a titan's reach, plucks them down to earth. Do we then find in Jonson the playwright a certain down-dragging earthiness? We do; and it only makes matters worse that as a dramatic craftsman he greatly excels Marlowe. For a further clog on him is the tremendous quantity, as it were, of baggage that he has to carry: his moral principles, his literary aversions, his immense vocabulary, above all his erudition: his Pegasus (of percheron breed, one fancies) is as burdened with gear as the White Knight's horse, and before he and his huge master can be airborne mechanical aids are needed. These Jonson tirelessly invents and employs.

Of the great comedies at least this is true. He anathematised the contraptions of Inigo Jones, who worked in profile-board, without seeming to reflect how much of a stage machinist he himself was in his handling of flesh and blood. One character he undeniably created, and that was himself, as revealed in every action and utterance of his life and not least in every work he put his pen to. To ask whether in truth he created

any other would be to invite the angry expostulations of all good Jonsonians. What about Brainworm, Bobadil, Master Stephen, Master Mathew, Oliver Cob, Justice Clement, Volpone, Mosca, Corvino, Sir Politick Would-be, Sir John Daw, Sir Amorous La-Foole, Subtle the Alchemist, Dol Common, Drugger, Sir Epicure Mammon? What of his puritans, Tribulation Wholesome, Ananias and Beal-of-the-Land Busy, to say nothing of the sharply observed ragamuffins of *Bartholomew Fair*? Besides, these characters endured; the actors of the Restoration found them good parts in which to spread themselves; Garrick was to excel in Abel Drugger, whom the romantic Kean rather pleasingly confessed to Garrick's widow that he could not play. Did not Charles Dickens, whose eye for character everyone must allow, revive *Every Man in His Humour* with an amateur cast, himself playing Bobadil, and before Royalty, at the St James's Theatre? It is true that Lord Melbourne enlivened an interval by pronouncing the affair even more damnably dull than he had expected. Why? Was it because Dickens, misled perhaps by a fellow-feeling for a fellow-Londoner, credited Jonson with his own instinctive love for every human creature he so precisely saw and jotted down? Dickens precisely saw and jotted down the unthrifty Mr Micawber, but he loved him, and thereby gave him wings. Would Jonson have loved him? Poised as he then was between the fantasy of the age of reason and the sentiment of the age of progress, Dickens at last found himself embarrassed by Mr Micawber, and packed him off to the antipodes, there to become something less than the total and adorable failure that he was. That would not have satisfied Jonson; he would have had rods in pickle for "Micawber, a poor gentleman credulous that something will turn up"—we need only amend the last lines of *Volpone*:

Thou, Micawber,
By blood and rank a gentleman, canst not fall
Under like censure; but our judgment on thee
Is . . .

what? What kind of doom would Jonson's honest disapproval of Micawber suggest? Probably a Tantaesque hell, in which five-pound notes were forever turning up and disintegrating as soon as he grasped them. For it is a fundamental difference between Jonson and Dickens that Dickens—whose greatest characters, being immortal, are also static—loves even his rogues; Jonson has small patience even with his fools: he

would have kicked Mr Toots round the stage. That he wrote in a more brutal time is no explanation; it is a fundamental difference between Jonson and Shakespeare that Jonson, for his life, could not have made us love Master Slender.

His device of "humours" is significant. It is a mechanical device: precisely the recipe one would expect a powerful brain to evolve as infallible in the manufacturing of comedies. You take, not a whole man, but his most salient trait; if you choose, you may name him accordingly, so that the audience will know what to expect of him and the actor will know what to do with him. A braggart will brag, a chatterbox will chatter, a fop will mince and a gentleman averse to noise will be incommoded by noise, for two whole hours or as long as the play lasts. Take as many of these extracts of humanity as may suit you, lard them with words, season with wit and bawdry and toss them in a frying-pan over the flames of your derision; surely a most succulent dish of comedy must result? Well, no; of satire perhaps, of farce perhaps, if you have the invention and vitality to keep it going—as Jonson unquestionably has. These single-faceted creatures are in fact no other than our old friends the abstractions of the Morality, Sloth, Envy, Gluttony, Good Counsel and the rest, subdivided into a score of more particular manifestations, tricked out with new and glowing verbiage and presented with Elizabethan gusto. The gusto, like the verbiage, is not theirs but their master's. They are, in the modern phrase, too rigidly conditioned to imperil the master-plan by developing unmechanical, illogical, inconsistent personalities of their own. The humanising of them was the actors' job—what actor of experience has not at some time animated a dead part with a transfusion from a live one? All the same, when Shakespeare—if that story is true—pressed the Lord Chamberlain's Men to take a chance with *Every Man in His Humour*, it may well have seemed to him as firm, shapely and vivid a presentation of contemporary life as had yet come their way. He played in it himself. We shall never know whether, when rehearsals gave place to resoundingly successful performances, he inclined to another view. An actor of average quality looks to his author for nothing more than a showly part, good lines and situations, and a clear hint as to the kind of person he is supposed to be; to the average actor of the Lord Chamberlain's Men Jonson was bountiful as to the first three items and dictatorially explicit as to the last. But an actor of more than ordinary imagination wants to know not only what he is but what in the course of the play he is to become; and to him Jonson returns a dusty

answer. In *Every Man in His Humour* everyone aboundingly is, but nobody becomes. Did it dawn on Shakespeare, at the very moment when his flair for modernity was endorsed by the box-office, that all these spirited types were life-size marionettes, jiggling and clicking in obedience to a giant's hand? Or had the quondam playdoctor's shrewd, poetic-commercial judgment told him, after one reading of the script, that here was the very stuff for the Lord Chamberlain's Men but, most decidedly, not his kind of stuff at all?

As an observer and by no means dispassionate reporter of human conduct we can give Jonson the comic dramatist full marks. But if we are to deal with him so we must mark him highest for *Bartholomew Fair*. Here he is a cartoonist drawing from the life and accentuating as he chooses, unembarrassed by his uprightness and positively helped by his pugnacity, free of any obligation to make a dramatic pattern that will reconcile human diversity and the eternal harmonies. No need, here, to deck rascality with glorious verse; here is this kind of Jonson at his best, greedy of London and only half-loathing it; everything is here that is delightful and detestable in any crowd. This is a picture that Hogarth might have painted if he had been born a century earlier, a canvas enriched with laughter, cozenage, obscenity, and the will to live and enjoy. With dirt also; for at the end of his two-thousand-word induction Jonson cheerfully calls attention to the fact that the Hope theatre (where the play was first done) is as filthy as Smithfield (where the real Fair was held) and "as stinking every whit". That his eye for types sees no further than skin-deep does not matter here, for in this swirl of surface life, not to say of scum, we are allowed only the briefest glimpses of the human heart; it is odd that these few glimpses are more satisfying than any others he affords us, except perhaps in his *Alchemist*. The truth is that Jonson was less concerned with the human heart than with the human mind, and in particular with what he conceived to be the follies of the human mind. His was indeed a cartoonist's view of life, and it is significant that in *Bartholomew Fair*, in which no person very much matters, he attains in dramatic form the very pinnacle of the cartoonist's art: a stock Puritan, richly drawn, is confronted and confounded by a puppet Dionysus. This Dionysus is literally a puppet, part of a puppet-show in the Fair, and with the triumph of his ideas over the Puritan's ideas Jonson winds up the play and tosses all his puppets, wooden and human alike, back into the box.

If however you prefer to see such teeming half-humanity

marshalled within the frame of a plot, however crazy, you may compromise on *The Alchemist*, which in point of date (1610) falls midway between *Bartholomew Fair* and the earlier *Volpone*. It is something that Shakespeare never succeeded in writing: a plain farce, for all its torrent of words. Its mechanism, contrived to produce situations, cannot be said to creak, it moves too fast; say rather that it rattles. There is only one way to handle it, and that is as all farce must be handled, by playing it strongly from line to line with a momentary truth to life that numbs the judgment. Jonson's audience was as unexacting as Shakespeare's on the score of probability. But in no major work of that time will you find more transparent knavery, or less credible credulity, than in *The Alchemist*. Indeed, to induce belief is no part of its aim, which is to amuse, deafeningly, stunningly, on the huge Jonsonian scale.

Of the almost forgotten *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, the former not only incurred official censure but was noisily rejected by the public. Yet contemporary men of letters were as warm in praise of it as of *Volpone*. Its spirit is noble, its verse majestic; the action proceeds cumulatively and excitingly to an appropriate conclusion which redresses a disturbed balance and affirms a moral law. Yet Jonson the moralist does not here seem to intrude, since his theme is commensurate with himself. If these two dramas had had more success he might have been encouraged to turn his strong hand to the reshaping of English tragedy, with what results no one can say. It is only when we compare *Sejanus* with *Julius Caesar* that we find in it a certain rigidity. Then we begin to see how Jonson is held down by his industry, his learning and his fidelity to Tacitus and Suetonius, and how Shakespeare is positively liberated by his flair, his small Latin and less Greek, his far from servile reliance on the twice-translated Plutarch: in short by his lack of that which for Jonson was synonymous with toil. There is a further point of comparison. *Sejanus* belongs to the period of Shakespeare's "bitter" comedies, reflecting as they may do an age that is growing out of humour with itself, whose laughter is becoming hard and dry. Within a year Shakespeare was probing the ultimate mystery of evil. Jonson seems never to get beyond storming at its outward manifestations.

Power without charm: is that the final judgment? A titan, lacking divine percipience, divine compassion; a heart overmastered by a prodigious brain? If that is the conclusion to which the plays impel us, we must look elsewhere for some

explanation why he was, manifestly, so loved. We may find it in the warmth, as well as wisdom, that animates the collection of aphorisms to which he gave the strange name of *Timber, or Discoveries Made upon Men and Matter*, or in the tender epitaph on little Salathiel Pavy, or in the *Execration Upon Vulcan* with which this poor and harassed scholar gaily damned the fire-god for destroying his precious books. That "rareness" of his accords with the notion of a man whose crowning achievement was the self that he kept for his friends. At all events, the Jonson that Herrick remembered did not lack charm:

Ah BEN!
Say how, or when
Shall we thy guests
Meet at those lyric feasts,
Made at the Sun,
The Dog, the Triple Tun?
Where we such clusters had,
As made us noble wild, not mad;
And yet each verse of thine
Outdid the meat, outdid the frolic wine.

Chapter 22

Chapman

IT IS EASY to name Shakespeare's predecessors, not so easy to decide whom, after Jonson, we are to regard as his contemporaries. If by a contemporary we mean any man who made his mark in the drama before Shakespeare laid down his pen, there are ten major names to be considered. They are, in order of birth: Chapman (c. 1560–1634), Dekker (c. 1572–1632), Heywood (c. 1573–1641), Tourneur (c. 1575–1626), Marston (c. 1576–1634), Fletcher (1579–1625), Middleton (c. 1580–1627), Beaumont (1584–1616) and Ford (1586–1639); to them we must add the name of Webster, of whom we know that he may have been born about 1575 and was no longer living in 1635.

Such a grouping is not wholly satisfactory. There is no doubt about Chapman; he was Shakespeare's senior by four years and outlived him by eighteen; his first known play appeared at about the time of *The Merchant of Venice*, his best known in the days of the great tragedies. But Ford was Shakespeare's junior by twenty-two years; his first known play, long lost, appeared in the year of the retirement to New Place, his best known in the reign of Charles I. Moreover we observe that Beaumont died in the same year as Shakespeare, Fletcher nine years later; yet in the work of Beaumont and Fletcher there is perceptibly a post-Shakespearean quality. Still more is this perceptible in the work of Middleton, Tourneur, Webster and Ford.

Nor shall we do any better if we attempt to classify by theme or vein; our blithely anarchic theatre submits to no such treatment. Most of these poets tried their hands at everything. Between them they cover the whole field of drama as reviewed by Polonius; some were at their most successful in collaboration, and with the possible exception of Tourneur not a man of them was content to stick to a single line of business. Of the strands we have detected in Shakespeare's predecessors each one runs on, sometimes plainly to be seen, sometimes inextricably intertwined with others: the chronicle-heroic, through Marlowe, in Chapman; the chronicle-popular, through Greene in Heywood and Dekker; domestic tragedy in

Heywood and Middleton; the tragedy of blood most clearly in Chapman, Marston, Tourneur, Webster and Ford, less clearly in Middleton, with Rowley in attendance. Beaumont and Fletcher were not only universal providers but universal inheritors also. Tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral: in that fruitful partnership there was hardly a theme, hardly a vein, that did not find expression.

We cannot even group these writers as belonging, some to the apogee, some to the decline, because their individual merits or shortcomings might make nonsense of any such regimentation. What we may do however is to group them according to their several bents of mind, as far as these can be discerned. Let Chapman stand first, then, in virtue of seniority and of his inheritance from Kyd and Marlowe; next, Heywood, Dekker and Middleton, as men of the theatre who have a good deal in common; next, the strongly self-assertive Marston; next, the well-born, all-encompassing and fortunate twins; finally, as specialists in nightmare, Tourneur, Webster and Ford. This perhaps is as much of a pattern as one can hope to make.

George Chapman spans the great age.¹ He was born two years before *Gorboduc*, and was still living in the days of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. Educated at both universities, he is believed to have spent a good deal of his early manhood abroad; it is not until his middle thirties that he emerges as playwright for the Admiral's Men. His *Blind Beggar of Alexandria* was produced in 1596. He made his mark quickly, for two years later Meres included him in his list of contemporary dramatists as among "our best for tragedie", and praised him similarly for his comedy, although we do not now think much of the *Blind Beggar*. For us his fame rests chiefly on those translations of Homer that opened a new world to Keats; and his portait, cloud-encircled, bears out our notion of him as one of the immortals. Accordingly we approach his plays with deference. So does Sir Adolphus Ward who, echoing Lamb, observes that in the reflective beauty of individual passages he has no superior among the Elizabethans save Shakespeare, also finding in him something of Shakespeare's metaphysical profundity and of his power to communicate wisdom and feeling in the flash of a single line. But how does Chapman rank as a practitioner of the highly specialised art of writing plays?

One has always to remember that that word-intoxicated

theatre offered fame and money to any poet who could turn out resounding lines, whether his true bent was dramatic or not. Since it continued to yield Chapman both for many years after the appearance of his *Iliad*, neither he nor his public would have been likely to entertain the suggestion that he was not really of playwright stuff. Yet it may be significant that, as one of his editors has remarked, he was at his best in collaboration.² Left to himself, he does not seem to have made up his mind as clearly as some of his contemporaries on the question of what a play should be and do. He is the descent of the scholar dramatists, supplying the theatre with a great part of its needs, but from outside. Of a reflective and profound mind as Ward says, he does not talk easily through other people; he must be Chapman. It is Jonson's failing, with a difference. His comedies are strenuously in the prevailing mode; in *All Fools*, held to be his masterpiece in this kind, there is an embroilment as complicated as any that Plautus ever devised. But the action is not helped by a verse and prose that are always comely, sometimes beautiful, and for the most part so markedly Chapman's own that you may find it hard to tell which character is speaking. He is most in his element toward the end, when Valerio is made to deliver a most witty discourse on the subject of cuckoldry. But what should we think if at the end of *As You Like It* Touchstone were to give us not a hundred and fifty words on the Seventh Cause—which some of us find enough in all conscience—but an unbroken thousand?

Nor is this incurable wordiness his only failing. His high style, which is himself, accentuates the poverty of his invention. In *The Widows' Tears* his quest for a strong comic situation leads him to a strange one indeed. The gallant Lysander, in order to test his wife's fidelity, sends her word that he is dead, seduces her in disguise and from that moment cohabits with her, still unrecognised, until the plot is ripe for unravelling. The scene of these events is the family vault; but that, William Archer observes, "is neither here nor there. It is merely a characteristic Elizabethan condiment". The play is praised by Ward for its effective execution, by Swinburne for its rich comic force; neither challenges it on the score of human probability.

As to the essence and aim of Tragedy, however, Chapman seems to have made up his mind when, in 1613, he dedicated *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* to Sir Thomas Howard. After tilting at sticklers for historical exactitude, he proceeds to say that "material instruction, elegant and sententious

excitation to virtue, and deflection from her contrary" constitute "the soul, limbs and limits of an authentional tragedy". Aristotle himself might have wished to add something to this; so might even the exponents of classical restraint across the channel, to say nothing of our own wild tribe. But Chapman could hardly have laid down a more succinct ruling for the epic poet that, in truth, he was.

Marlowe, during the formative years, had rigged us an epic drama and sent it forth with swelling sails. Dying too young to bequeath us any rulings, he left us the mighty line and a sense of human greatness, curbed by the eternal laws that his half-medieval spirit at once acknowledged and defied. Marlowe wrote his tragedies for Alleyn and the Admiral's Men. It may be a mere chance that within three years of his death Chapman was writing comedies for them; but the hand of Marlowe is strong on Chapman. Three years more were to pass before he ventured on a tragedy, now lost. By that time he had produced the first seven books of his *Iliad*, and the hand of Homer was surely strong on him too; for while the tremendous work was proceeding he must have had a very regular assignment on the plains of Troy.

Troy and Tamburlaine together were bound to leave their mark, and it is not surprising to find in Chapman's tragedies some echo of Homeric thunder and Marlovian brag. Of these the more notable are *Bussy d'Ambois* (1604), *The Conspiracy of Charles, Duke of Byron* (1608), *The Death of Charles, Duke of Byron* (1608), and *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois* (1610). It may be remarked that not one of them perfectly exemplifies Chapman's view of tragedy, as set forth in his dedication of 1613. The most rewarding to study is the first, for a number of reasons. *Bussy d'Ambois*, like its successors, is remarkable for its free handling of events in France that were then fresh in everyone's remembrance, yet it makes few concessions to our insular or Protestant prejudices; from which we may infer that Chapman had an independent mind. It carried him to eminence as a tragic dramatist in the very days when Shakespeare was progressively demonstrating what English tragedy might be; it therefore helps us to understand what the average Jacobean playgoer looked for in tragedy. It also signalled Nat Field's emergence as a star performer of the kind that a generation ago we styled romantic: it therefore tells us something of the acting of that time. Finally, it confronts us with the spectacle of a classically-minded Chapman fumbling with an enfranchised and nondescript drama that Racine might have set right for him in one way and

Victor Hugo in another. All in all, *Bussy d'Ambois* has its place in our theatre's history.

Any romantic dramatist who knows his business will agree that the title of the play is good; there is a promise of parry and thrust in the very sound of it. The story is no less promising. Bussy, nobly born out of wedlock, is introduced at court by the scheming Monsieur, brother of the King, who has designs upon the throne. At once he reveals himself as a pertinacious undoer of great ladies and an invincible swordsman; but he displeases his patron when his bluff honesty wins him the affection of the King. Monsieur plots against his favourite, and Bussy is done to death in an ambush in which his mistress has been compelled, by torture, to play her part. In Chapman's hands all goes pretty well through two acts and more. Some things are revealed in action, but the soliloquies are at least strong and clear. The Messenger's account of Bussy's triple duel is more epic than dramatic, recalling manifestly the combats of the *Iliad*; but Chapman can cite in his defence the messengers of Greek tragedy. The equivocation of Tamyra, Countess of Montsurry, with the friar who plays pandar to her ungoverned lust, and with the husband she has deceived, is so richly done that if we saw these scenes played as excerpts we might marvel at our neglect of Chapman. Unhappily, as the play goes on the reason for that neglect becomes only too evident. A wordy fog descends, lifting a little, it is true, for an admirable exchange of plain speaking between Bussy and his treacherous patron. What happened to the play at this point is a matter of conjecture. Perhaps it was the theatre people who reminded Chapman that apparitions, blue fire and rackings were indispensable, if his tragedy was to draw the town. Perhaps it was in response to their representations that he not only bedevilled a sufficient plot with unnecessary nonsense of that kind, but threw in some unconscionable rant. Here is Montsurry ordering his wife to write, in her own blood, the letter which is to ensnare her lover:

Come, syren, sing, and dash against my rocks
Thy ruffian galley, rigg'd with quench for lust;
Sing, and put all the nets into thy voice
With which thou drew'st into thy strumpet's lap
The spawn of Venus, and in which ye danced;
That, in thy lap's stead, I may dig his tomb . . .

Later, when he has twice stabbed her and, as it would seem

from her entreaty to be "let down", hoisted her in a kind of estrapade, he gives free rein to his feelings:

The too huge bias of the world hath swayed
Her back part upwards, and with that she braves
This hemisphere, that long her mouth hath mocked;
The gravity of her religious face
(Now grown too weighty with her sacrilege
And here discern'd sophisticate enough)
Turns to th'antipodes; and all the forms
That her illusions have imprest in her,
Have eaten through her back . . .

Chapman had ample precedent for roof-raising frenzies of this kind. Even Hamlet breaks into something like nonsense when Claudius hurries from the play, so does Cleopatra over the dead Antony, and so do Othello and Leontes in their trouble. But Shakespeare's nonsense, quite apart from the fact that it never goes on for very long differs from Chapman's in its uncanny appropriateness to the speaker and the occasion. These ravings of Chapman might be styled utility, all-purpose ravings, available in short lengths or long to any lady or gentleman who finds any set of circumstances insupportable. Pre-fabricated, no; they are too easy to fabricate on demand; a minute or two is enough, under the lamp. For the truth is that, to use a metaphor no more slipshod than some of his own, Chapman was fain at times to set the stage on fire with midnight oil.

It may however be noticed how often he prefers the simile. The long-drawn simile, the "as when" that leads us on and up through mounting images, has its place in epic; in a play it may be disastrous. The human spirit can explode in a metaphor; at dramatic pitch it does not cast about for felicitous parallels. Hamlet's world is an unweeded garden, it is not *like* one. At the point of annoyance at which our everyday life verges on the dramatic, we do not say of a bore that he is like God's rain; we say simply that he is wet. Chapman in his comedies can be as trenchant when he chooses; but when great events are pending and a nobler drama begins to stir, too often he hushes it with a simile, and puts it to sleep again; too often he lets occasion slip and meanders off on some interminable comparison. Those reflective passages admired by Ward do not represent the best of Chapman the dramatist; moreover, to be candid, we have to wade through a good deal of third-rate stuff to find them. But here, in *All*

Fools, Chapman the poet shews something of his quality; Valerio is rebuking the cynicism of his friend:

I tell thee Love is Nature's second sun,
Causing a spring of virtues where he shines;
And as without the sun, the world's great eye,
All colours, beauties, both of Art and Nature,
Are given in vain to men, so without love
All beauties bred in women are in vain . . .
Oh, 'tis the Paradise, the heaven of earth;
And didst thou know the comfort of two hearts,
In one delicious harmony united,
As to joy one joy, and think both one thought,
Live both one life, and therein double life;
To see their souls met at an interview
In their bright eyes, at parley with their lips,
Their language, kisses: and to observe the rest,
Touches, embraces, and each circumstance
Of all love's most unmatched ceremonies,
Thou wouldst abhor thy tongue for blasphemy.

In the study, it may seem that the *Conspiracy of the Duke of Byron* and *Tragedy of the Duke of Byron* are better fashioned than the d'Ambois plays. But it is the melancholy fact that *Bussy* is positively the livelier for Chapman's descents into stage claptrap and that the *tragedy* is the more tedious for want of them. Its action is held up by long debates as of the gods on Olympus and quite as dull, and by stuffed-out recapitulations in which ten lines do the work of one. Act II gave offence to the French ambassador and was suppressed and lost; but even in Act III there is no indication that anything of a dramatic nature has occurred since the beginning of the play. Then at last things begin to move. The conspiring Duke falls from favour, is apprehended and brought to trial, defends himself with a very full relation of matters already familiar to the audience, is sentenced, and goes defiantly, and wordily, to his doom. As the hideous formalities bear down on him drama of a sort does stir us, but too late: this is an epic, not a dramatic, tale. But what must also be said of it, as of Chapman's other three famed tragedies, is that in its pounding fashion it proclaims, irrespective of dramatic relevancy, a liberal and noble view of life, traceable to Homer and Marlowe, possibly innate in himself. There are some high moments; this is one, when the condemned hero declines the ministrations of the Church:

Horror of death! Let me alone in peace,
 And leave my soul to me, whom it concerns;
 You have no charge of it; I feel her free:
 How she doth rouse, and like a falcon stretch
 Her silver wings, as threatening death with death;
 At whom I joyfully will cast her off.
 I know this body but a sink of folly,
 A glass of air, broken with less than breath,
 A slave bound face to face to death, till death.
 And what said all you more? I know, besides,
 That life is but a dark and stormy night
 Of senseless dreams, terrors, and broken sleeps . . .
 And death is nothing; what can you say more?

He derisively points out that in the Ptolemaic universe heaven is below as well as above, and he cannot fail to go there; his final fling is well known:

I will not die
 Like to a clergyman; but like the captain
 That pray'd on horseback, and with sword in hand
 Threatened the sun, commanding it to stand.

Choosing our quotations with care, we can easily shew that Chapman was all the dramatist that he was held to be. It was Dryden who first dismissed *Bussy* as worthless. The play had so long a life that Dryden, when he was forty-nine, could neither forget nor forgive the spell it cast on him when he was young. His understanding, he supposed, must have been subdued by theatre magic, by the lights, the scenery, the costumes—above all, he revealingly admitted, by “the grace of action . . . these false beauties of the stage are no more lasting than rainbow: when the actor ceases to shine upon them, when he gilds them no longer with his reflection, they vanish in a twinkling”.³ He did not say, as perhaps he should have done, whether the remembered spectacle of *Bussy* in full panoply inspired his own conception of the death-defying Almanzor, who is very much the descendant of Chapman’s tragic heroes. But in those words he implied a compliment as handsome as any poet of one age could pay to the players of another. For indeed if *Bussy* held its own against such contemporaries as *Measure for Measure* and *Othello*, still more if it continued to thrive for decades to come, one reason must have been that it offered superlatively skilled performers an opportunity that they were quick to take: an opportunity for courtly swash buckling such as their

public loved under the auspices of a poet who was known to have translated Homer. The discerning were won by stately verse and moving sentiment, the less discerning by the cloak-and-sword promise—slow in fulfilment, but the stance and gesture kept them happy—of cut and thrust. “Grace of action” is Dryden’s tribute to Nat Field and his successors in the part; and in reading *Bussy* it might be well to have at hand the Dulwich portrait, and to wonder all the time how this post-Burbage young man sounded, and looked, and used his fine eyes and ruffled, at this moment or that. For whether or not Chapman was really a playwright, or at his best in collaboration, or when Homer took charge of his thought and guided his pen, it is undeniable that he produced, all by himself, a great deal of stuff that the players were glad to turn into good theatre.

Chapter 23

Dekker, Heywood, Middleton

WHEN DRYDEN EXCORIATED Chapman for his bad verse he did nothing to dispel the illusion, long dear to literary circles, that five acts of good verse constituted a play. Nor did Charles Lamb when, by way of demonstrating to what heights the old dramatic poetry could rise, he published his *Specimens*.¹ For these excerpts, and the fervid commentary that accompanied them, tended to encourage the notion that a playwright is to be judged chiefly by the quality of his lines. As a consequence Lamb unwittingly contributed to a confusion of fine literature with fine drama from which not even Shakespeare's eulogists were free until Granville-Barker resolved it in a phrase, styling him the Genius of the Workshop.

The three poets we have now to consider were all found worthy of quotation in the *Specimens*. But they were also constant labourers in the workshop where Shakespeare learned how plays are made. They loved the theatre; once it got into their systems they never got it out: Heywood in particular is cheerfully impenitent on the subject. They learned, better than Chapman ever did, what kind of story a play should tell, and how to tell it; what to show and what to hide; the manipulation of suspense. They wrote copiously for the moment, careless of posterity. But, as our scholarship works its way from the study to the stage, their reputations are likely to grow.

Not much is known about Thomas Dekker;² even the years of his birth and death are uncertain. Because of his name and the occasional appearance of a Dutchman (real or bogus) in his plays, he is supposed to have been of that derivation; and it has been noted that in his portrayal of the world about him he shews a Dutch painter's eye for homely detail. There is some evidence that he began his life as a tailor's apprentice, much that that life had its share of unhappiness, for toward the end he solemnly averred that we shall never live in heaven if we have not first looked into hell.

Like other artists who have private misfortunes, he is more concerned with the song than with the thorn. His capacity for delight in his species is unbounded. If you would have all the

fun of *Bartholomew Fair* without a splitting headache afterwards, and like to come away feeling really fond of the human beings you have met and glad that they have got what they wanted, you cannot do better than turn to *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599). Here are to be found all manner of good things of which we wish greater writers than Dekker had given us more: country freshness in London and cockney jollity as far afield as Old Ford, just as Greene might have done them, but in gayer colours on a wider canvas. Or if we care to know, in such detail as Shakespeare has no time for, what was the daily round of Francis, the immortal drawer of the Boar's Head, here and elsewhere in Dekker is London's tap-room life in full. Or if we are curious to see of Jonson's humours work themselves out in real people, without Jonson himself treading on our toes and puffing in our face as he explains what (rather than who) they are, we shall be gratified again, and bless a true dramatist who lets a part speak for itself. No formidable intellect has been at work devising appropriate names for every character: Dekker's four women are called Margery, Rose, Sybil and Jane. But as soon as any one of them has spoken a line she had made her name her own; virgin or fulfilled, they are all charmers.

How Rowland Lacy, son to the Earl of Lincoln, slips back from the French wars and, in the disguise of a Dutch apprentice to the Shoemaker, makes furtive love to Rose, daughter to the Lord Mayor; how Ralph the true apprentice, pressed for the wars, comes home a cripple just in time to retrieve his Jane from a suitor who (since Dekker refuses to leave anyone disgruntled) does the gentlemanly thing; how the Shoemaker himself, Simon Eyre, goes dancing through the whole like a mad god on a frolic, and when he becomes Lord Mayor himself hob-nobs with his King and puts all to rights: such, in bare outline, is the tale of this tumultuous and happy play. Not only does that last scene echo Greene's notion of the relation of subject and sovereign but, two and a half centuries before *A Christmas Carol*, it shews a positively Dickensian resolve that everyone shall get on with everyone else and have more than enough to eat and drink. In fact, Dekker's London and Dickens's London have a good deal in common. It is a wonder that Dickens did not light on the *Shoemaker* for his amateur theatricals. A pity too; Lord Melbourne might have been less bored.

Since the whole of this play is judged to be Dekker's unaided work, it is helpful to determining his share in the many joint productions which bear his name. In the two parts of

The Honest Whore (1604-5) it is clearly his underplot which transfers to Milan the realities of London's 'prentice life and of Bedlam and Bridewell, and as clearly Middleton who sees Bellafront through the woeful pilgrimage that follows her reformation. But the division of labour was not always so simple. For in the first picture of Bellafront in *gaudio* Dekker's Dutch pencil has obviously been at work, to such effect that there is real danger lest in this ostensibly edifying play the devil shall have the best scenes. It is Middleton, one fancies, who dexterously effects the transition from realism to the less exacting vein of romantic tragi-comedy. Hippolito, smitten by the harlot's beauty, throws her into a transport of self-abhorrence by denouncing her way of life with such particularity and relish that Lamb suspected Dekker of playing on our baser instincts; but these lines may after all be Middleton's. Whichever of the partners hit on the excellent idea marrying the penitent Bellafront to the wastrel who was the author of her ruin and then exposing her to overtures from the man who has saved her soul, it is unquestionably Dekker who exhibits in all its detail the squalor of a bankrupt gambler's home, and probably Middleton who handles the passion-ridden Hippolito. Middleton may have conceived the notion of introducing Bellafront's long-lost father, but he surely left the creation of him to Dekker; for the racy, peppery, tender-hearted and distracted old gentleman who eventually takes her to his arms would have got on well with the mad Shoemaker. Both poets together guide the play to a satisfactory ending; Dekker certainly furnishes the parade of by no means honest whores which enlivens the final scene. It is not suprising that a *Second Part* appeared within a year, because in its alternations of somewhat stereotyped vice and virtue with a humour drawn straight from life the play has all the essentials of good melodrama.

In the much later *Witch of Edmonton* (1621) Dekker and Ford joined forces, with William Rowley serving, perhaps, as liaison between two very different talents. In this strange, and strangely powerful, study of forced marriage, murder and rustic necromancy we should not overlook Rowley's share. It may well have been he who built the play, Ford who infused it with horror of his own special brand, and Dekker who gave it its air of broad-sheet authenticity. Its humanity too, perhaps. For poor Mrs Sawyer is no true witch; it is only when she has been beaten as one that in a rage she calls on the powers of darkness and acquires as her familiar a huge black Dog; nor are her subsequent endeavours in the art much more

than the freaks of a half-witted and cantankerous old woman. Yet she ends on the gallows. Frank Thorney is no true murderer; gulled into secret wedlock with a wench who is pregnant by another man, and then driven by his father into marriage with a local heiress, he is little worse than a weakling and a fool. Yet he goes to Tyburn in the train of Mrs Sawyer. The real significance of the story is that by her rash invocation Mrs Sawyer has let loose in Edmonton a mischief beyond her ken. With remarkable inventiveness the play is in fact held together by the Dog, a pantomime animal quite as fearful-funny as Red Riding-hood's wolf. Wherever he shews his black muzzle mischief is bound to follow, sometimes ridiculous, sometimes deadly; for it is the Dog who rubs against Frank's leg and prompts him to murder. The dark flashes in which Ford hews his power could not be better offset than they are by the easy matter-of-factness that Dekker (surely Dekker?) brings to such episodes. Ford alone would have left us saying, as indeed his audience did not mind saying, *Credo quia horrible*. It is Dekker who makes the play just credible, even to us. Dekker would have us believe in it because the people are human, and after three centuries he still nearly succeeds.

Critical tears have been shed over Dekker's inequalities; but nobody weeps for the ups and downs of Thomas Heywood.³ This is partly because in his ups he can be, for a play's duration, not only humane but serious and fine; mostly because, holding a steady norm through all his varying quality, there runs a love of the theatre amounting to infatuation. Here is no Lodge disdaining to cater for penny knaves' delight, nor even a Shakespeare retiring to New Place when he can afford to, but a Lincolnshire gentleman, believed a Fellow of Peterhouse, who was writing for the Lord Admiral's Men at twenty-six. He joined them as actor at twenty-eight, and was thirty-three when he drew six pounds from Henslowe for his finest work of all. This was for Worcester's Men, later known as Queen Anne's Men, with whom he remained until the death of their patroness in 1619. Retiring at forty-six, he soon found the pursuit of letters tedious, possibly less good for his pocket, and returned to his first and only love. He was prolific, caring little what he wrote, still less whether it attained the immortality of print, provided that it served the stage; according to Kirkman the bookseller he played almost every day, but never let a day go by without one sheet of writing, writing only to be acted, as he was, and publishing at last only in self-defence against piracy. At sixty-three he confessed to having had "either an entire hand, or at the least a main finger" in two

hundred and twenty plays—which is far short of Lope de Vega's reputed fifteen hundred, but creditable. In 1612, in a preface to his *Apology for Actors*, he had declared:

He that denies, then, theatres should be
He may as well deny a world to me.

And to the end of his days it seems that the theatre was for him no gentleman's pastime, no means of acquiring fame, if perhaps money to keep one going, but an all-sufficing way of life. If the date of his death is certain he timed it well, for next year they closed the playhouses.

He is hard to classify, as are many of his time who wrote in every vein. Much of his work was played at the Red Bull, before an audience who preferred homely thrills and tears and laughter, ballad-inspired transcripts from life, to the more rarefied agonisings and salacity of the higher drama. In our dramatic literature there is a strain, one might say, of bourgeois-chivalrous decency: from John Heywood (who may have been of the same stock as Thomas) and the More-Rastell circle onward through the unstable Greene, when he felt his nostalgia for country things. It is of course strong in Shakespeare, although he is not much concerned with middle-class life. It eludes the court comedy of the Restoration, but reappears in full strength in Goldsmith and Sheridan; it sets the moral standard of nineteenth-century melodrama. Heywood's regard for a decency of this kind (it is by no means incompatible with bawdy humour) is apparent in everything he turns his hand to. In *The Fair Maid of the West* (c. 1610), for all its glamour of Plymouth Hoe and the Azores and the court, complete with harem, of the King of Fez, it is the virtuous and lovely barmaid of the Castle tavern whose decency and commonsense control the action. She even keeps her head when the dusky potentate offers to create her true-love Chief Eunuch, although she is perfectly clear as to the deprivation which that eminence must entail; throughout every unforeseeable happening she remains as sensible and wholesome as Black-eyed Susan. There is the same fundamental decency even in his astonishing *Rape of Lucrece* (1607): Scaevola's hand in the fire and Horatius at the bridge are worked in with rough adroitness, and so are some delightful and outrageous lyrics, but the inflamed Sextus goes to his sin with a full sense of its enormity; that sin is nailed to the stage, whatever embellishments of the story were indicated as likely to please at the Red Bull. Decency is inherent in *The English Traveller*

(1625), whose main action turns on a gentleman's love for a woman, as to what is meant by playing the game. But as early as 1608 Heywood had explored the dramatic possibilities of the theme; in nothing that he wrote does the aforesaid decency come out more strongly than in *A Woman Killed With Kindness*.

On this play, rightly known as Heywood's masterpiece, such praises have been lavished by Lamb and others that it will be reassuring to see how far they are really deserved. Has it, for example, the intellectual and moral elevation in virtue of which a good play may become a great one? Moral elevation, on the whole yes; intellectual, on the whole no; this is a domestic tragedy of general significance, but by its very nature it cannot scale the heights of *Othello* or *Lear*. Allowing, as we should do, for the stage conventions of the time, how faultlessly does it employ them? Not altogether faultlessly; there are soliloquies and asides that Shakespeare's craftsmanship would have replaced with subtler revelations. Has it the integrity we look for, now, in a work of art? Certainly, in that main plot and under plot are neatly linked and that the touches of comedy are germane to the whole. Did it, and could it still, move an audience deeply by legitimate means, with reticence and dignity? Decidedly, yes.

All the same, one could wish that Heywood had defied popular usage and expanded his central theme to fill the play. It is the simplest of stories: of a betrayed husband and a betraying friend, of a young wife so serene in her wedded happiness (it is a good part for those who can play it) that she is not proof against the sudden prospect of an escapade, of a very un-Mosaic abstention from reprisals, of a death-bed reconciliation while the lover of a moment goes out to face the world again and make of it what he can. It has something of the appeal of *The Stranger*, at which Thackeray laughed, remarking at the same time on its undercurrent "reality of love, children, and forgiveness of wrong, which will be listened to wherever it is preached, and sets all the world sympathising".⁴ It has something of the appeal of *East Lynne*, at which ourselves laughed when we were young. But in fact it is the monumental predecessor of both. As dramatic literature it is unpretentious, if judged by the standards of the age; the business in hand is what matters, and there is no superfluity of words. There are some fine lines, but the finest is not a line at all, merely the broken-hearted husband's iteration of his wife's pet name. But every aspect of the calamity, from the dawn of suspicion to the dreadful certainty and the numb resolve to deal justly, even to the emptiness of the house when

honest man is alone with his recollections, is set before us with a dexterity and understanding of stage effect only to be compassed by a poet who loved the theatre enough to give his life to it. One shudders to think what gratuitous horrors or noble bombast some of the greater Elizabethans might have wrecked this honest play if it had been theirs.

Lamb called Heywood a prose Shakespeare. Doing so, he was indulging a propensity to hyperbole in which Swinburne was to surpass him. Heywood had an eye that saw deeper than the surface, but he does not compare with Shakespeare as a reader of the human heart. Yet he was, like Shakespeare, a man of the theatre working in the theatre, and on his more pedestrian level he had very much the same view of men and things. One would like to think that that decency of his was an embarrassment to the forces that were clamouring for the theatre's destruction, and whose final onslaught he escaped by dying in the year when the King left town. For Puritanism was very much an affair of the ever more articulate middle-classes; yet it was a middle-class view of romance and morality, coupled in a good life, that Heywood upheld on the stage of the unpretentious house of Satan where he was mostly to be found. Lamb might have done better to dub him the Shakespeare of the Red Bull.

Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) ⁵ is believed to have been born in London and to have entered Gray's Inn in 1596;⁶ within a few years of that date he had joined the sodality of the workshop. His eye for the comedy in real life was as keen as Dekker's or Heywood's, and in *A Trick to Catch the Old One*, a lively tale of cozenage which may be said to mark the end of his apprenticeship, he shews himself no less adroit than they in transferring it to the stage. But he was also a romantic, and this strain in him was destined to carry him to an eminence beyond even Heywood's reach. It is apparent in the verse, of a grace comparable with the early Shakespeare's, that redeems his first known play from oblivion. We have already noticed it in his contribution to *The Honest Whore*. It is discernable in his joyous comedy of *The Roaring Girl*, in which Dekker was his collaborator, and which calls for more than passing mention.

Moll Frith, *alias* Cutpurse, was a problem child who by her twenty-fifth year, when the play immortalised her, had become a formidable personage in London's underworld; after many vicissitudes she died of a dropsy as the Commonwealth was nearing its end. When the partners decided to put her on the stage it would seem that the romantic in Middleton and the

humanitarian in Dekker came to terms, for they present her, not merely as a chaste, but positively as a good and lovable young woman. She goes swinging through the story as a loud-mouthed, pipe-smoking, bawdy-singing virago, whose sword and wit alike are ready in defence of her own honour, of star-crossed lovers and of gentlemen running from the law. She knows her wicked world, and the thieves' cant, but she emerges as the play's good fairy. If toward the end her goodness verges on the smug, she has by that time become too real a creature to be perfunctorily consigned to wedlock and happiness ever after. Lord Noland indeed enquires of her when she proposes to marry, and she replies

Who, I my lord? I'll tell you when, i' faith;
When you shall hear
Gallants void from sergeant's fear,
Honesty and truth unslandered,
Woman manned, but never pandered,
Cheats booted, but not coached,
Vessels older ere they're broached—

is this an allusion to her own early experience?

If my mind be then not varied,
Next day following I'll be married.

And when his lordship observes that this sounds like doomsday—

Then were marriage best;
For if I should repent, I were soon at rest.

In its alternations of mood and pace and its opposing of the appropriate types at the appropriate moment the craftsmanship is excellent; the action is so little diffuse that it hardly needs the unlocalised stage of its day and might even gain by scenic treatment. Better still. Moll herself is a unifying agency in the story.

The same can hardly be said of *A Fair Quarrel*; more's the pity, for the central theme is good and novel. Captain Ager's fire-eating Colonel provokes him by calling him a bastard; a challenge is the only possible reply. His mother, Lady Ager, is properly indignant when she hears of the aspersion on her virtue. But the Colonel is a duellist of renown, and sooner than send her son to his death she allows him to believe that the

charge is true. Reeling under this blow, the Captain nevertheless holds by his own stern code of honour, and to the amazement of his brothers in arms he refuses to fight in a cause that he supposes to be unjust. The imputation of cowardice at once furnishes him with a just one, and the audience are not deprived of their swordplay. Unexpectedly but satisfyingly it is the Colonel who falls; Lady Ager retracts her confession; the two combatants outvie each other in gestures of chivalry, and the Colonel, now a reformed character, bestows his sister's hand and fortune on the Captain. The episode is handled with a humanity and common-sense that recall Heywood at his best, the verse is direct and of noble quality. Unhappily it is no more than an episode, insufficient by itself for a public that liked its gruel thick and slab. It may have been Rowley's part, as joint author, to enrich the story with two more plots which have little relation to it and not much to each other: to wit, of a very indeterminate heavy father's secretly married daughter who, when the pains of childbirth are near, confides herself to the care of a lecherous and blackmailing physician; and of the comic country squire who seeks to wed her but somehow drifts to London to learn the lingo of the roarers and become their dupe. In the final scene the three stories are merged at least as well as such things were in nineteenth-century melodrama. It is only to that by no means despicable level that this fine play descends; and it is some measure of the authors' expertness that in the course of that descent there are few dull moments.

Again and again, in the plays of Middleton and his associates, we are reminded what a curse the convention of the double plot could be to poets of tragic power. They could take no chances: the audience must be held one way or another. We can trace that convention from the imps who enlivened the Mysteries and the Vice who did the same for the Moralities, and so on through Marlowe who defied it in *Tamburlaine* and yielded to it with disastrous results in *Faustus*. Lear's Fool still demonstrates how comic relief may be worked into the fabric of a grave play. But, supposing Shakespeare had been so doubtful of his ability to sustain—say—*Othello* as to diversify his grim tale with scenes of bawdry, what would have become of *Othello*? The answer has to be: exactly what became of certain large conceptions of Middleton which he, rightly or wrongly, believed himself incapable of sustaining through five long acts without someone else's help.

An instance is that half-masterpiece *The Changeling*. Nobody to-day remembers the intricate sub-action from which

the play takes its name. All we remember is the affair of Beatrice-Johanna and the wolfish De Flores. Beatrice, daughter to the Governor of Alicante, finds herself furiously in love with one Alsemero on the eve of her wedding with another man. It is too late to break off the engagement; nothing will serve but that the bridegroom shall disappear before the ceremony. She summons to her aid De Flores, an impoverished and unattractive gentleman whose devotion she has hitherto rejected with contempt. De Flores undertakes to liquidate the unwanted bridegroom and does so, perfidiously and bloodily, before our eyes: Middleton, with the rambling fortress of Alicante at his disposal, is adept in Gothick terrors. But when De Flores brings Beatrice a grisly token of his success he makes it clear to her that a momentary reward is not enough: he claims her body. Torn between physical repulsion and fear that in his recklessness he will divulge the truth, she yields. It is a magnificent scene, as Betterton was one day to discover; and when in due course Alsemero leads her to the altar she is no longer a virgin. On her bridal night she eludes discovery by the time-honoured device of inducing her maid (who is truly a maid) to take her place until the first coition is achieved. With great ingenuity the fraud is made just credible; Beatrice, pleading modesty, has asked for no words and total darkness. But when the maid lingers happily in Alsemero's bed long after it is time for her to quit it, romantic drama threatens to disintegrate in farce. A brisk sequence of arson and murder makes some show of restoring the play to its tragic level, but it is too late; not even the final blood-bath quite avails. For all that, the lycanthropic De Flores is a figure that haunts the memory; if you speak his lines you will know that Middleton has not only seen him clearly but has penetrated every cranny of his wicked and hungry heart:

Soft, lady, soft! . . .

You see I've thrown contempt upon your gold—
Not that I want it not, for I do, piteously:
In order I'll come to it, and make use on't,
But 'twas not held so precious to begin with,
For I place wealth after the heels of pleasure . . .

Not that I want it not, for I do, piteously is a perfect example of Middleton's hold on truth: every actor knows the value of that bread-and-butter reflection, coming when it does. A moment later, in reply to Beatrice's remonstrance:

A woman dipped in blood, and talk of modesty! . . .
Look but into your conscience, read me there;
'Tis a true book, you'll find me there your equal:
Pish! fly not to your birth, but settle you
In what the act has made you; you're no more now.
You must forget your parentage to me;
You are the deed's creature; by that name
You lost your first condition, and I challenge you,
As peace and innocency has turned you out,
And made you one with me.

BEAT. With thee, foul villain!

DE F. Yes, my fair murderess; do you urge me,
Though thou writ'st maid, thou whore in thy affection?
'Twas changed from thy first love, and that's a kind
Of whoredom in the heart; and he's changed now
To bring thy second on, thy Alsemero,
Whom by all sweets that ever darkness tasted,
If I enjoy thee not, thou ne'er enjoyest!
I'll blast the hopes and joys of marriage,
I'll confess all; my life I rate at nothing.

BEAT. De Flores!

DE F. I shall rest from all plagues then;
I live in pain now; that love-shooting eye
Will burn my heart to cinders.

BEAT. O sir, hear me!

DE F. She that in life and love refuses me,
In death and shame my partner she shall be.

BEAT. (*kneeling*) Stay, hear me once for all; I make thee master
Of all the wealth I have in gold and jewels;
Let me go poor unto my bed with honour,
And I am rich in all things!

DE F. Let this silence thee:
The wealth of all Valencia shall not buy
My pleasure from me;
Can you weep Fate from its determined purpose?
So soon may you weep me.

BEAT. Vengeance begins;
Murder, I see, is followed by more sins:
Was my creation in the womb so curst,
It must engender with a viper first?

DE F. (*raising her*) Come, rise and shroud your blushes in my
bosom;
Silence is one of pleasure's best receipts:
Thy peace is wrought for ever in this yielding.

'Las, how the turtle pants! thou'lt love anon
What thou so fear'st and faint'st to venture on.

His power as a writer of scenes supresses his power as a builder of plays. He has not Shakespeare's double mastery, and when he relies on a lesser man's stagecraft the disparity in quality of mind becomes apparent and we have a commonplace structure splendidly adorned. When, as it were, he collaborates with himself, when the realist and the romantic in him are working in harmony, he can do with us as he pleases; he has the prosaic touch that compels belief, yet is magician enough to brew the murk in which stage horrors thrive. Unfortunately this harmony seldom endures for very long; the recurrent intrusion of an underplot is enough to break it, and the inevitable paradox ensues that the plays for which he is most famed are not, as plays, his best. If the whole of *The Witch* had been on a par with the Hecate scenes this work might have been alive to-day. Middleton's hags are not the doom-fraught creates of Shakespeare, but their squalid trafficking and lyric raptures must have been a great joy to write and act. Sad to relate, they serve as relief to a tragi-comic plot that steadily declines from the improbable to the preposterous. As for *Women Beware Women*, it is a play that makes one sigh for the hardihood with which our forebears improved on *Romeo and Juliet*, for its principal theme fulfils its promise to the last. The wicked Livia is a study fit to rank with De Flores, and the young bride whom she corrupts goes down into the mire by credible degrees even as she rises to a ducal throne. But the ruin of poor Bianca is as nothing to the ruin which, after a couple of premonitory shocks to our reason, overtakes the play. Swinburne aptly describes the end as solution by massacre. Within the space of a hundred lines the adulterous and incestuous Isabella dies of a noxious vapour prepared for her by Livia; the panderous Guardiano falls through a trap on to the spikes he has set for another; Livia herself dies of the vapour she has prepared for Isabella; the incestuous Hippolito is pierced (by a Cupid in the masque which is proceeding) with a real and poisoned arrow and in torment runs on the swords of the guard; the lecherous Duke expires after drinking from the cup which his Duchess intends for his brother the Cardinal, and the adulterous Duchess, draining it, follows him into the shades. In short, this is a careful and serious play which fools fine actors to the top of their bent and then dashes them by reverting to the ancient tragedy of blood.

The degriugolade in *The Spanish Gypsy*⁷ is much less per-

ceptible, but it is there. The play's chief weakness is that it begins as a pressure that it cannot keep up. The rape of Clara in the first act is shewn with an unsparing honesty that excites horror as much as pity. She sings no pretty descant on her lost virtue; instead we see her feeling her way about the darkened room until she finds a crucifix; with grave charity she forgives her violator and they go out hand in hand. It would be hard to overpraise this scene. But all too soon Clara seems to become alive to her opportunities as a wronged heroine of romance, and the energy begotten by a fine opening is dissipated in sentimental and picaresque comedy. What were Middleton and Rowley about, we wonder, when they raised expectations that they could not satisfy? But that question may not have occurred to an audience who were content enough if the evening started with a thrill.

Of these men, Dekker and Heywood each produced one work worthy to be termed a masterpiece. Middleton produced nothing so homogeneous or well-rounded as *The Shoemaker's Holiday* or *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, unless we doubtfully take into account *A Game at Chess*, a brilliant but rabid political satire which brought him into disfavour and, it is thought, ended his career as a dramatist. Yet if he is to be judged by the intensity of his imagination, the strength and beauty of his lines, and the heights to which these qualities carry him in many a scene, he is beyond question the most considerable figure of the three. The insecure Dekker, for all his output, had a certain indolence of mind for which we love him none the less; if he remained irresolute and half-fulfilled it was because the mere stuff of life afforded him such delight that he seldom probed very deeply below its surface. Heywood enjoyed the relative security of an actor and playwright under contract; all that hampered his ascent of Parnassus was his day-to-day contentment in being able to write any thing of any kind for his beloved theatre. Middleton was secure through the last decade of his life to the extent of ten pounds a year as Chronologer of the City of London, an appointment in which Jonson succeeded him; how far his efforts were spurred by the need to live we do not know, but may guess from the fact that within a year of his death his widow was destitute. Yet the hand-to-mouth conditions in which he worked did not deflect him from a remarkably persistent enquiry into the human heart. He loved the sunlit streets of London and the pageant of life that they displayed; but that dark romantic urge of his lured him incessantly from sunlight to torchlight and thence to the shadows where hot and secret passions reign. Less con-

tent than Dekker with life as it was, possibly less content than Heywood with the theatre as it was, he pursued with commendable steadfastness a tragic poet's truth. But all these theatre men pursued, according to their several lights, some kind of poet's truth. They evolved scenes, if not whole plays, that on the stage of to-day might prove to be something more than period exhibits, something in fact surprisingly akin to the drama of to-day. They are all ghosts now, and it is fruitless to speculate whether they would be amused or abashed to learn what weighty judgments the scholars have passed upon them.

Chapter 24

Marston

IT HAS BEEN suggested elsewhere in these pages that we may learn more of the mechanics of the Elizabethan theatre from an inferior playwright who had frequent need of them than from a great one who had not. Similarly, in the study of any age of letters, quite as much may be learned about that age from the talented second-rater who is entirely of it than from the man of genius who transcends it. A case in point is that of John Marston.¹ He was not only an Elizabethan Englishman but a half-Italian Englishman; he could hardly have been more than he was a man of his era. Forceful, adroit, witty, coarse and aboundingly alive, qualifying as a poet for recognition by Lamb in the *Specimens*, he is nevertheless debarred from the front rank of the immortals by an inherent mediocrity of mind. Yet no man better reflects the stage for which he wrote. Moreover, since he worked almost exclusively for the Children of Paul's and of the Queen's Revels, his plays, particularly his first two, which we are chiefly to consider, throw a revealing sidelight on the capabilities of those young people.

He was the son of an Italian lady who married a Shropshire squire; certain characteristics which distinguish him from his contemporaries may be attributable to this fact. Born in 1576, he graduated at Brazenose eighteen years later and was destined for the bar; but, as his father ruefully observed in his will, "man proposeth and God disposeth". He began to attract notice as a satirist and poet, although his early *Pygmalion*, in the manner of *Venus and Adonis*, may fairly be described as the product of a halting muse and a priapic fantasy. In 1599 he produced *Antonio and Mellida* and its sequel *Antonio's Revenge*. This two-fold work is worth examining in some detail as a tragical history which found general acceptance at about the same time as *Hamlet*, *Prince of Denmark*.

The theme is tyranny and vengeance. Piero Sforza, Duke of Venice, has put to rout the fleet of Andrugio, Duke of Genoa, and sets a price of "twenty thousand double pistolets" on the heads of Andrugio and his son Antonio. But Antonio loves Mellida, daughter to Piero, and in his fallen state he conceives

the idea of entering Venetian territory disguised as an Amazon. Their love is secretly renewed, and Mellida also assumes disguise and flies with him. Andrugio, reunited to his son, resolves to beard his conqueror alone. This he does at a banquet and in full armour, claiming the reward for the head that is still on his own shoulders. For reasons that are not made clear, Piero dissembles his hate; and by the end of the first part father and son are installed at court and Antonio is betrothed to Mellida. A friendly alliance of the two dukedoms is apparently in prospect.

The Second Part has barely begun when Piero reveals that this is not his intention at all. Smeared with gore and brandishing a poniard and a torch, he gives order that the bleeding trunk of a young gentleman whom he has just slaughtered for the purpose shall be taken to his child's bed and bound to her body as evidence that she has been unchaste on the eve of wedlock. He also discloses that he has made away with Andrugio and intends to marry his widow; for the unsuspecting Maria, Duchess of Genoa, is on her way to Venice. The psœan of triumph with which he ends the scene is a fair sample of the merits and demerits of Marston's high style:

I am so boundless happy. Doth she come?
By this warm reeking gore I'll marry her.
Look I not now like an inamorato?
Poison the father, butcher the son, and marry the mother, ha!
Strotzo, to bed: snort in securest sleep:
For see, the dapple grey coursers of the morn
Beat up the light with their bright silver hooves
And chase it through the sky. To bed, to bed!
This morn my vengeance shall be amply fed.

When the ghost of Andrugio appears to Antonio, insisting on reprisals, Antonio obeys, beginning with the tyrant's infant son. Slowly and succulently he stabs the boy to death, assuring him as he does so that his personal feeling for him is entirely friendly:

Come, pretty tender child,

It is not thee I hate, not thee I kill.
Thy father's blood that flows within thy veins
Is it I loathe; is that revenge must suck.
I love thy soul; and were thy heart lapt up
In any flesh but in Piero's blood,
I would thus kiss it; but being his, thus (*stabs*), thus (*stabs*)
And thus (*stabs*) I'll punch it. . . .

It is his own Mellida's little brother of whom he is disposing in this fashion, and appropriate ravings follow; even Andrugio's ghost groans in the cellarage. Some rough casuistry is needed to round off the scene; he invokes the murdered child:

Spirit of Julio,
Forget this was thy trunk. . . . Thy father's blood
I thus make incense of, to vengeance.
Ghost of my poisoned sire, suck this fume:
To sweet revenge perfume thy circling air
With smoke of blood. I sprinkle round his gore,
And dew thy hearse with these fresh-reeking drops.
Lo, thus I raise my blood-dyed hands to heaven,
Even like insatiate hell, still crying, More!
My heart hath thirsting dropsies after gore. . . .

Since it is all too easy to make game of such plays by strictly factual narration and by quoting whatever seems excessively pretentious or absurd, let us try to be just. Let us remember that a fine tenor does not always know when he is singing high-sounding rubbish, and wonder for a moment how a fine speaking voice may have sent this near-rubbish across to an auditory who did not care very much what their ears drank in so long as it was hot and strong. How finely, in fact, was it spoken?—for we have also to remember that the *Antonio* plays were done by the Children of Paul's. Bearing this in mind we can proceed, picturing the infants at their work as best we may.

We need hardly proceed in great detail. Antonio, understandably, finds it well to disguise himself again, this time as his mother's Fool, presumed to have accompanied her from the court of Genoa. It is in motley that he witnesses her nuptials and the trial of Mellida before her foul-mouthed father, learns of Mellida's death and duly agonises, and profits by the rumour of his own to conspire with sundry Venetians who in one way or another have been outraged by Piero's mad and bloody rule. The dictator meets his end, following a sound precedent, in the course of a masque. His tongue is torn out, perhaps as a rather superfluous acknowledgement to Kyd; with some recollection of *Titus Andronicus* the mutilated fragments of his son are offered him on a dish; and the slow-stabbing *motif* swells to a full close as he dies under repeated swordthrusts and a hail of imprecations. A grateful Senate invites the assassins to assume any offices they choose in a reformed government; but the assassins set an example to pos-

terity by deciding that a period rest and meditation is what they really need.

This was the most ambitious revival of the tragedy of blood since Shakespeare had worked on *Titus*, and it may be evidence of a veering of taste that within a year or so Jonson was doctoring the original Heironimo for the Admiral's Men. But if Kyd was out of fashion Marston seems to have resolved, being twenty-three at the time, to make a bid for modernity. He may well have persuaded himself and his public that he had succeeded, for this sprawling work has an odd veneer of sophistication, the sophistication of a young scholar who is confident of his ability to clothe old horrors in new and startling language; confident also that any tragedy may be made to go by a skilful alternating of unchecked rant and staccato realism, a succession of rhapsodies and shocks. Sometimes, when his pen runs freely, we almost wonder whether it does so in consequence of a drop taken; when the verse bumps and jerks we feel much too often that he is soberly trying for effect, for a harshness that will pass for strength and mannerisms that will pass for style. In his handling of bloodshed there is a more sinister kind of artifice; Kyd would not have sent the dagger into young Julio's breast with such felicitous timing or such lingering relish. And since, for all Antonio's protestations of love, the pair never meet until the boy comes on to be killed, we are in some doubt whether the scene's real purpose is to excite compassion or to tickle jaded nerves.

When an audience was prepared to swallow any affront to reason for the sake of a series of thrills, the author was of course relieved of any obligation to provide a plausible story; but he was left with the no less difficult task of making every situation credible without one. He could only do this by the magic of his verse and the violence of his action. An idiot's tale, signifying nothing, must be full of sound and fury if it was to succeed on the stage; and *Antonio* can have been carried to success only by the robustious passion-rending methods which Hamlet in that very season was deploring. Yet the indoor theatres where the boy companies played were not for the groundlings but for persons of rarer taste. If the little eyases had not made Marston's verse sound better than it was, and had not done their stabbing, scragging and dying with breath-bereaving artistry, *Antonio* must assuredly have foundered in a storm of laughter.

When, in *Satyromastix* (1601), Marston assisted Dekker by exercising his gift of satire at Jonson's expense, that greater man responded by lampooning him as Crispinus in *The Poe-*

taster. He held him up to derision as a picker of other men's brains, and in some gorgeous parody told him very clearly what was the matter with his style. The rhodomontade of Marston's *Sophonisba* (1606) suggests that he was unable to learn the lesson. Indeed it is problematical whether he ever learned it, whether the innate mediocrity aforesaid ever permitted him to distinguish between his own real poetry and his own trash. But Jonson did not arraign his stagecraft; and this was just. Bogus and ridiculous *Antonio* may be, but it has one advantage over, say, Chapman's tragic efforts; it is seldom dull. Marston knew from the first how to keep a play on the move. Within his limits he had a playwright's eye for character; if the clash of noble natures was beyond his imagining, he was never at a loss to bring the lesser types of humankind into a dramatic relationship. Consequently his comedy, pervaded though it is by a strange but somehow characteristic sourness, is better than his tragedy.

It was his misfortune to be outclassed in every vein he tried. Many more people have heard of Heironimo than have heard of Antonio and Mellida, and in unadulterated horror for horror's sake Tourneur eclipses him. His *Isabella* in *The Insatiate Countess* (1610) is a pale foreshadowing of Webster's *White Devil*, possibly because he could not soar even to the nobility of absolute sin. In such comedies as *The Dutch Courtesan* (1603) and *The Fawn* (1604) he shews something of Jonson's flair for humours and of Dekker's for the transcribing of low life; but he cannot equal either in execution. Like other secondary figures of his time he goes best in double harness. To *The Malcontent* (1604) certain additions were made by Webster, who built it up for the King's Men when the Children of the Queen's Revels had demonstrated its possibilities. This wry comedy is coeval with *Measure for Measure*; it breathes something of the same air although it does not exhale the same goodness or sanity; but Burbage made a great part of the exiled princeling who as Malevole returns in disguise to try the loyalty of his former subjects. And when in the next year Marston joined with Chapman and Jonson (the quarrel being patched up) in the writing of *Eastward Ho!* the outcome was entirely happy. One might almost think this comedy was a gesture of appeasement to the City fathers, to whom it is dedicated in the prologue; it is such a gay and sensible tale of 'prentices, idle and industrious, and of the vanity of social aspirations; and it is sad that a few jibes at King James's thirty-pound knighthoods and the acquisitive habits of the South-invading Scot landed the perpetrators in trouble.

It must however be conceded that Marston attained one kind of pre-eminence, and that was in the contemporary failing of obscenity. In his somic scenes salaciousness is enriched by plain dirt—which is again indicative, perhaps, of a determination to go one better than his models. It is no mean feat to raise the gorge across three centuries, but Marston can do it. Stripped of the show of style that was second nature in every writer of his standing, some of his sallies would not disgrace a Borstal dormitory; and even a fashionable Jacobean audience demanded more than smut. In fairness it must be added that Marston gave them a great deal more. When we wonder at his vogue in his own day, and at the endurance of *The Malcontent* in one adaptation or another, the reason may be that, while his verse, save for the flashes of beauty which Lamb noticed, is lumpy, or banal, or overstrained in pursuit of an originality which eludes him the more he strives, his prose dialogue, as he matures, becomes strong and shapely. It has a crispness so peculiarly Marston's own that we can detect his contribution to any plays of which he was author in part. Writing single-handed he was at his best, not when he tried to soar, but rather in scenes which he could develop with a cool, amoral gusto that was as yet new, and of which Jonson was incapable; these constituting, like everything he wrote, a second-rate poet's offering to first-rate histrions. Any actor, reading such scenes, will know instinctively how they should be played, and might even wish to play them. Some of the interchanges of ladies and gentlemen—for instance of the courtiers, male and female, in *The Fawn*—neat, brisk, abominably lewd and very funny, are not merely enlightening as to the manners, and as yet undiminished vigour, of an age when Shakespeare was turning from a grimmer kind of comedy to fierce tragedy. Read them aloud at the speed at which virtuosity could deliver them, and you will gain from Marston as clear a notion as any writer of that time can give you how it felt to sit under the chandeliers of Blackfriars in the first decade of the seventeenth century, when the play of the moment was in full swing. It may also occur to you that while Shirley is yet to come we are already on the road to Restoration comedy.

According to the authorities, *The Insatiate Countess* was Marston's last full play. In 1616, having taken orders, he was appointed to the benefice of Christchurch, near Southampton. In 1634 he died in London, and was buried in the Temple.

Chapter 25

Beaumont and Fletcher

UNDER THE STUARTS, our drama completes its arduous ascent, and emerges on a pleasant upland. There are fields reserved for the display of valour, and here and there a chasm still yawns, a peak still rises, tempting the adventurous: but for the most part the mountain scenery is agreeably horrid, not oppressive. The plain is charming, diversified with cities, palaces and citadels, with satyr-haunted groves and purling streams, and the turf is soft beneath the feet of idyllic shepherdesses. It opens out before us as far as the eye can reach, and there seems no reason why it should not extend for ever. In other words—or so the subjects of this notice might have reasoned—we have entered upon our inheritance; our elders having discovered for us what a play really is and just how to set about writing it, nothing remains for such ingenious people as ourselves but to apply the rules and go ahead.

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher¹ were neither poor scholars like Greene nor grammar-school boys of the middle class like Shakespeare. They were born, if not precisely in the purple, on the fringe of it. The elder Beaumont was a Justice of Common Pleas holding some state at his seat of Grace-Dieu in Leicestershire, and Francis, his third son, was sent to Broadgates Hall, now Pembroke College, Oxford. In 1600, being then sixteen, he went down without taking his degree and entered the Inner Temple. Fletcher's father, a jovial divine, was for some years in high favour with the Queen, and became successively Bishop of Bristol, of Worcester and of London. John, also a younger son, was admitted in 1591 at Benet's (later Corpus) College, Cambridge, of which his father had been fellow and president; it seems that he too left the university without any academic distinction. It is not known how or when the young men became inseparable companions, sharing the same quarters on Bankside and even, according to scandalous rumour, the same wench. But their professional association had begun, if the latest ascriptions are right, by 1606, when Beaumont is believed to have joined with Fletcher in the production of *The Woman-Hater*; Beaumont was then twenty-two, Fletcher twenty-seven. It appears

to have ended in 1613, when Beaumont married; in 1616 he died, and was buried near the entrance to St Benedict's chapel in the Abbey of Westminster.

Their collected works were published under the editorship of Shirley in 1647, when authority permitted the reading of drama but not the acting of it. In his enthusiasm for masters to whom he owed much, Shirley attributed to their joint effort a number of plays in which later scholarship has detected the several hands of Jonson, Dekker, Middleton, Rowley, Field, Webster, Massinger and others, including Shirley himself, thereby not only adding greatly to our difficulty in disentangling authentic Beaumont from authentic Fletcher but crediting Beaumont with a share in nearly thirty plays that appeared after his death. But, since we are dealing with men of undeniable genius whose productions were the expression of themselves, the task is not hopeless. We have a clue in a commendatory reference to "Fletcher's keen treble and deep Beaumont's bass". We find a further clue when we compare the plays produced during the partnership with those produced after its termination; in the latter there is perceptibly one voice missing, and that must be Beaumont's. The two voices are audible in the lines. Something in Beaumont inclines him to the firm decasyllabic as an instrument of deep emotion; something in Fletcher inclines him to a looser measure, so full of supernumerary feet and over-spillings at the ends of the lines that now and then scansion is only possible if you slur; this lends itself to a colloquial and fast-moving verse that can at need be made as actual and commonplace as prose. Each style is the complement of the other. But in attempting these distinctions we must of course not forget that the two friends may often have been subject to each other's influence.

Their vogue was prodigious and enduring; moreover it was of a most honourable kind. Shirley in his preface declares that a young man might learn more in three hours of Beaumont and Fletcher at the Blackfriars than if he had the grand tour. They, not Shakespeare, are the culmination of the age; merely to mention them "is to throw a cloud upon all former names, and benight posterity". Shirley was fifty-one when he wrote these words, and in that grim epoch he had every excuse for nostalgic reminiscence. But he was voicing an opinion that had been generally held for a long time. For 1609, the year of *Cymbeline*, was also the year of *Philaster*, 1610 the year of *A Winter's Tale* and *The Maid's Tragedy*, 1611 of *The Tempest* and *A King and No King*; it is now generally agreed

that Fletcher's share in *Henry VIII* (1613) was very considerable. And no sooner had Shakespeare ceased to be poet in chief to the men of Blackfriars and the Globe than his accomplished young successors began to outshine him. They were still outshining him at the Restoration, when he was second favourite, Jonson running close; and it was six years before Dryden set to work to reinstate him. Even so, when the 1679 edition of Beaumont and Fletcher came out the bookseller's note offered "also to reprint old Shakespeare"—but only if adequate support should be forthcoming.

Many factors contributed to their success. Being far from idle they were blessed, not cursed, by the easy circumstances of their upbringing. They seem to have learned the workshop part of their business more by assiduous playgoing than by practice, for they appear as masters of it almost from the start. Their range was universal. They were bubbling with invention, and had at call an inexhaustible flow of verse that we still find enchanting. It was also an asset of no little importance that they were of good *ton*, and knew the Court from within. In short they were perfectly fitted to thrive in the climate of their time, as Shakespeare was no longer. For whether or no those last plays of his are the work, as some have said, of a tired-out man, they certainly seem to acknowledge that taste is changing in a changing world.

It is some indication of their youthful assurance that *The Woman-Hater* was immediately followed by a burlesque of the heroic-romantic drama in which they themselves were to win their way. The Wandering Knight was a familiar figure of the stage, deriving in uncertain proportions from Greene, from Marlowe and from Malory; we remember how Flute the bellows-mender aspired to play him. In *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) that ambition is attained by Ralph the London 'prentice, whose master and mistress thrust him, complete with squire and page, into a rather feeble domestic comedy which is at that moment proceeding. The ensuing confusions afford ample opportunity for the parody and satire which, with the Citizen's Wife as *commère*, have kept the play alive to this day. But a remarkable thing about this travesty is that the exuberant young collaborators cannot restrain their pens from writing admirable poetry. It is at a mock-romantic moment that Humphrey says to the lady of his heart:

Food Mistress Luce, however I in fault am
For your lame horse, you're welcome unto Waltham;—

but it is at a mock-horrific moment that Jasper "with his face mealed" appears as his own ghost and threatens to haunt his oppressor:

When thou art at thy table with thy friends,
Merry in heart, and filled with swelling wine,
I'll come in midst of all thy pride and mirth,
Invisible to all men but thyself,
And whisper such a sad tale in thine ear
Shall make thee let the cup fall from thy hand,
And stand as mute and pale as death itself.

In another context these lines might be horrific indeed.

The Sicily of *Philaster, or Love Lies Bleeding* (1609) is less the Sicilia of *A Winter's Tale* than the Illyria of *Twelfth Night*. At least it also is bathed in a soft radiance favourable to confused amours and the disguising of young women. But there are distinctions to be made, not to *Philaster's* advantage. Nobody at the court of Orsino knows Viola; everybody at the Sicilian court knows Euphrasia. Viola is a practical person who turns page to the Duke because he has no Duchess whom she can serve as lady-in-waiting, and in her character of Cesario she falls in love with him. Euphrasia is an arrant sentimentalist who assumes the name and habit of Bellario for no better reason than that she has an unrequited passion for Philaster, the heir to the throne; it is by mere chance that he finds her in a decorative posture beside a fountain in the forest and takes her into his service. Viola joyfully discards her false identity when her twin brother folds her in his arms; Euphrasia sticks to hers through a progression of calumnies and misfortunes in which those she most loves are equal sufferers with herself, and which she could determine at any moment by saying who she is. Nothing but the threat of torture induces her at last to persuade her father (in the course of thirty lines or so) that he has seen her face before. Finally it must be said that we all love Viola because she herself is unquenchably in love with life, but are at times in danger of becoming exasperated by Euphrasia's no less persistent resolve to shed as many tears as possible. So, if the Philaster-Euphrasia episodes were the whole of the play, we might pronounce it a feeble thing, designed to touch the heart and lull the reason. Fortunately they are framed in a more robust story: of the ruttish Pharamond, Prince of Spain, who woos the Princess Arethusa by day and lies with her gentlewoman by night, and of the Princess's love for Philaster,

which is crowned when the citizens rise in support of his claim to the kingdom. More fortunately still, there is an abundance of graceful verse. Even Pharamond's affair with Megra is allowed its meed of beauty, for when love of any kind is in question it seems beyond the power of these poets to be unmelodious. Philaster's account of the meeting at the fountain is celebrated; so is his adoring page's answer when in a transport of jealousy he asks the supposed boy if he knows what it is to die:

Yes, I do know, my lord:
'Tis less than to be born; a lasting sleep;
A quiet resting from all jealousy,
A thing we all pursue; I know, besides,
It is but giving over of a game
That must be lost.

Less quoted, but worthy of remark for an unmistakable echo of Viola's embassages, are Euphrasia's earlier lines to the Princess, when she is sent to her in similar circumstances:

If it be love
To forget all respect of his own friends
In thinking of your face; if it be love
To sit cross-armed and sigh away the day,
Mingled with starts, crying your name as loud
And hastily as men i' the street do fire;
If it be love to weep himself away
When he but hears of any lady dead
Or killed, because it might have been your chance;
If, when he goes to rest (which will not be),
'Twixt every prayer he says, to name you once,
As others drop a bead, be to be in love,
Then, madam, I dare swear he loves you.

One has to be careful in allotting praise or blame to the partners for their respective contributions to this charming if imperfect thing. It is not unlikely that the pair of them worked in unison, and that neither could remember, afterwards, exactly how much of it he had written. We might certainly land ourselves in absurdity if, on the strength of that allusion to "deep Beaumont's bass", we assigned Fletcher the, as one might put it, feminine share in the association; for years after it ended he was to prove his mastery of construction in *Valentinian*. Nor can we say that Beaumont was the finer poet

even though he was the profounder, as he was certainly the more sonorous; for in the year before *Philaster* appeared Fletcher alone, as the authorities agree, had produced *The Faithful Shepherdess*.

This is indeed a charming and perfect thing. Misapprehended in its day by a public whom Jonson condignly damned in sixteen forceful lines, it inherits something from the *Pastor Fido* of Guarini and bequeaths not a little to Milton's *Comus*. The persons of the play, as Fletcher forgivingly explained when he came to print it, are not agricultural hirelings, but property-owning democrats of Arcady, whose sole allegiance is to the great god Pan. It is refreshing to learn that, some two years after that still-remembered night when Faith, Hope and Charity staggered from the royal presence at Theobald's, Pan shews himself in Fletcher's presentation a great stickler for temperance and chastity. Clorin, faithful in her maiden widowhood, is half shepherdess, half healer and sibyl. Her herbal is as complete as Friar Laurence's. In the silvern twilight of a time that all humanity yearns for and will never recapture because it never was, she presides over the health and morals of a pastoral community. Apostrophising her dead love and recalling old delights, she says

But thou are gone, and these are gone with thee,
And all are dead but thy dear memory;
That shall outlive thee, and shall ever spring,
Whilst there are pipes or jolly shepherds sing.
And here will I, in honour of thy love,
Dwell by thy grace, forgetting all those joys
That former times made precious to mine eyes;
Only remembering what my youth did gain
In the dark, hidden virtuous use of herbs:
That will I practise, and as freely give
All my endeavours as I gained them free.
Of all green wounds I know the remedies
In men or cattle, be they stung with snakes,
Or charmed with powerful words of wicked art,
Or be they love-sick, or through too much heat
Grown wild or lunatic, their eyes or ears
Thickened with misty film of dulling rheum;
These I can cure, such secret virtue lies
In herbs applièd by a virgin's hand.

A visiting Satyr pays homage to her purity in the tripping measure that young Milton was to use. But even Arcadia has

its ups and downs, its frustrations and misunderstandings; none of which however—it is remarkable in a courtly poet—Fletcher presents without regard to the imperatives of a countryman's daily task: maidens may languish but they have to milk the cows; swains may miss their assignations, but the sheep must be grazed. His fantasy is as real as a good dream. It is sad that in pursuance of this dream-reality he offends Charles Lamb. No Arcady, surely, is complete without one wanton shepherdess; and it is a minor puzzle of criticism why Lamb—who delighted in the *fais-ce-que-voudras* of Wycherley—should have demurred at the man-mad Chloe, doubting whether such a weed could properly offset such a flower as Clorin. The fact is that the opposition of a Chloe is, dramatically speaking, very helpful to the Faithful Shepherdess; until she is restored to the less interesting status of an honest girl she contributes largely to the comic relief of the play. Chloe is under no illusion as to her propensities. Benighted in the forest, she reflects that she is more fortunate than other virgins in the same case:

For from one cause of fear I am most free:
It is impossible to ravish me,
I am so willing. . . .

An explanation of the only strait-laced judgment that Lamb ever pronounced may be that while Wycherley's Mr Horner, flitting in an amoral empyrean, could not dismay him, the behaviour of Fletcher's Chloe could, under the strict rule of Pan: an aesthetic blunder in short, not a moral one.

The Maid's Tragedy (1610) is recognised as the partners' crowning achievement in the drama of blood and passion. Here is the story. Amintor, a loyal gentleman of the Court of Rhodes, is commanded by the King to break off his engagement with the virtuous Aspatia and to marry the beautiful Evadne. The reason for this is unknown; but Amintor obeys with a docility only matched by the ease with which he seems to transfer his affections. On the wedding night Evadne denies him her bed, revealing that she is the King's mistress, and that it is his part to father any bastards she may bear. Bitterly, Amintor agrees to a pretended consummation, and next morning the couple maintain the fiction under a running fire of banter which casts an odd sidelight on the standards of delicacy prevailing at Whitehall under the first Stuart. The effect of this is to inflame the jealousy of the King, who is brutally explicit as to Amintor's duty as a subject. This added

humiliation is too much even for Amintor's fealty, and he unburdens himself to his bosom friend, the gallant Melantius, who is brother to Evadne. Melantius goes at once to his sister and overwhelms her with reproaches. In a state of extreme confusion Evadne agrees to restore the family honour by murdering the King when next she visits his bed. All goes according to plan; Melantius seizes the citadel; the deal King's brother comes to terms with him and ascends the throne. Meanwhile the forsaken Aspatia's grief has impaired her faculties; she dons male attire and "with artificial scars upon her face" presents herself to Amintor as her own brother, challenges him and receives a mortal wound. Still breathing, she has the satisfaction of hearing Amintor's repudiation of Evadne, who comes to him all bloody from her deed and begs to be taken to his embrace. Rejected, Evadne plunges her knife in her own breast and dies; Aspatia reveals her identity and dies; Amintor, desperate, stabs himself and dies. Melantius is about to follow suit, but is restrained by his friends.

Judged even by the same test of narration, this is an immeasurably better work than Marston's twin tragedies. It is much more compact; it puts less strain on our credulity. True, there is some superfluous attitudinising. In the big scene between Amintor and Melantius it is arranged that first Melantius shall draw his sword against Amintor in defence of his sister's honour, and that then Amintor shall draw his against Melantius under the taunt of having defamed her; both swords are as symmetrically sheathed. It is a more serious blemish that too often the characters are wrenched from nature in order to furnish a telling scene. In particular, Evadne's mental processes are obscure. She confesses her sin from fear, not from contrition; when she reluctantly swears to kill the King she invokes the "spirits of abused ladies" in the manner of an avenging heroine; when she does the deed she is a cold hell-cat who binds her sleeping lover and tortures him before despatching him. Leaving aside the miracles that sublime acting can work, there are two ways of making Evadne credible. One is frankly to represent her as deranged by her excesses; but that is too damaging to be thought of. The other is to submerge her inconsistencies in a flood of glorious poetry; and this her creators are well qualified to do. Moreover, confident that if they take care of the moments the scene will take care of itself, they break the flow at will with brief prosaic exchanges that impose the stamp of truth: it is Middleton's trick employed by master hands. We hardly need players to instruct us what can be done with such lines as these between

Amintor and Evadne—it is the wedding night, and he is puzzled by her refusal:

AMIN. Come, this is but the coyness of a bride.

EVAD. The coyness of a bride!

AMIN. How prettily
That frown becomes thee!

EVAN. Do you like it so?

AMIN. Thou canst not dress thy face in such a look
But I shall like it.

EVAD. What look likes you best?

AMIN. Why do you ask?

EVAD. That I may show you one less pleasing to you.

AMIN. How's that?

EVAD. That I may show you one less pleasing to you.

Later, still not understanding, he grows impatient:

AMIN. I sleep, and am too temperate. Some to bed!
Or by those hairs, which, if thou hadst a soul
Like to thy locks, were threads for kings to wear
About their arms—

EVAD. Why, so perhaps they are.

At last Evadne exultantly lets him have the truth:

I do enjoy the best, and in that height
Have sworn to stand or die: you guess the man.
AMIN. No; let me know the man that wrongs me so,
That I may cut his body into motes,
And scatter it before the northern wind.
EVAD. You dare not strike him.

AMIN. Do not wrong me so:
Yes, if his body were a poisonous plant
That it were death to touch, I have a soul
Will throw me on him.

EVAD. Why, it is the King.

AMIN. The King!

EVAD. What will you do now?

AMIN. 'Tis not the King!

EVAD. What did he make this match for, dull Amintor?

AMIN. Oh, thou hast named a word that wipes away
All thoughts revengeful!

We may feel that in Amintor's rejoinder we have another in-

stance of a psychological improbability smothered by a strong line; but his subservience may have seemed perfectly in character to an audience in whose eyes divinity still hedged the throne. But in this drama of situation such momentary artifices matter little, because the broad plan of the play shews excellent stagecraft, according to the notions of the time, to some extent of our time too. The story is set moving by the dramatically right people in the dramatically right manner—not, according to a usage that even Shakespeare sometimes adopted by negligible gentlemen acquainting each other for our benefit with facts that they already know, but by Melantius himself, fresh from the wars; by Aspatia herself, who in three frigid lines tells him his congratulations are misdirected and passes from the scene, leaving an indelible impression. Indeed the handling of Aspatia is ingenious throughout until she makes the sacrifice to romance that we have already noted. One might think there was nothing to be done with the jilted Aspatia, who by being jilted has served her purpose; yet her presence haunts the play. She is among the ladies appointed to prepare Evadne for the marriage bed that should have been her own, and her private grief presages tragedy to come. Wearing the willow, she does not indulge in derelict lamentations, although precedent again would justify her, but finds an anchorage for them. As thus, when she sees one of her women working on a tapestry of the ill-used Dido:

Fie, you have missed it here, Antiphila;
You are much mistaken, wench:
These colours are not dull and pale enough
To show a soul so full of misery
As this sad lady's was. Do it by me,
Do it again by me, the lost Aspatia;
And you shall find all true but the wild island.
Suppose I stand upon the sea-beach now,
Mine arms thus, and mine hair blown with the wind,
Wild as that desert; and let all about me
Tell that I am forsaken. Do my face
(If thou had'st ever feeling of a sorrow)
Thus, thus, Antiphila: strive to make me look
Like Sorrow's monument; and the trees about me,
Let them be dry and leafless; let the rocks
Groan with continual surges; and behind me,
Make all a desolation.

The last sight of her, groping for the hand she loves as the

mists of death close in, is unspeakably touching. She is a great improvement on the lachrymose Euhprasia.

Splendid sound, splendid fury, splendid posturings; there will be occasion to enquire how far the drama of that age was also the opera and ballet of ours. The same splendours mingle with comedy and martial romance in *A King and No King* (1611). This is a tale of supposedly incestuous love which ends not only happily but on a note of strict propriety; we may wonder why Dryden rated it as high as he did. It is more interesting to see what the unaided Fletcher made of Caractacus and Boadicea two years later. Some harmonies of *The Maid's Tragedy* are certainly missing from *Bonduca*. In this tumultuous epic of the British resistance it is as though Fletcher were harking back to Marlowe, only to be rebuffed by the impossibility of turning an endless succession of irregular hendecasyllabics into mighty lines: the verse is too tense and nervous to let the action stride, and the action itself is needlessly involved. But some granite figures emerge from the confusion. Nothing could be more noble than the eventual surrender of Caratach to the admiring Romans. There are two proud death-scenes: the end of *Bonduca* and her daughters might have ranked with that of Cleopatra and her ladies if Fletcher had first shewn us more of their hearts. He was to sound his tragic top-note next year, in *Valentinian*.

The theme is the corruption bred of power. The Emperor Valentinian, although warned by his commander-in-chief, Aecius, that his evil life is bringing him into contempt with the army, persists in his designs on Lucina, the girl-bride of the noble Maximus. Her chastity is proof against all inducements: so by a message purporting to come from her husband she is lured to the palace, where the Emperor ravishes her. The wronged pair take counsel with Aecius as to the course that the Roman code enjoins. Lucina is for self-destruction, Maximus for revenge; the level-headed soldier entreats them to set their duty to the throne above their personal honour. But Lucina resolutely goes home to die; and from that moment Aecius knows that his friend is a man who must be watched. The moral ruin of Maximus begins. Vengeance and the power that it will bring him become his obsession; the thrue-hearted husband is step by step transformed into a conspirator who accounts Lucina's honour and life well lost if that loss helps him to power. Since the loyal Aecius is likely to bar his way, he traduces him to the Emperor and thereby encompasses his death. Vengeance, ironically, eludes him; for Valentinian dies at the hand of a cup-bearer, formerly in the

service of Aecius. Power he achieves, for in the disorders that follow the army acclaim him Emperor. At his inaugural banquet he falls back dead, poisoned by the widowed Empress.

It is one mark of a good play that its matter can be summarised in a sentence and its action in a paragraph. Here both tasks are easy. There is no sub-plot; all minor happenings stem from the central theme. *Valentinian* is an exemplary work for any dramatist who values craftsmanship; Fletcher's flair for the how and when, the by-whom and to-whom of dramaturgy, is remarkable. The first line plants the unassailable purity of Lucina, and the picture is filled in, not by admiring friends but by the chap-fallen Imperial pandars whom she has rebuffed. When in the second scene we behold her, she is resisting the blandishments of the Imperial bawds, so that her virtue is more firmly established, but without repetition, for to women it wears a new facet. By this time we are naturally agog to meet the wicked Emperor, and in the third scene we do so. Here again there is first-rate contrivance. The Emperor proves to be rather a jolly person, a little indolent and pleasure-loving perhaps, but always glad to hear the truth about himself; and when Aecius fears he has said too much he thanks him, and tells him not to be afraid: Caesar will behave in future—with one small private reservation in the matter of Lucina. Dinner and dice follow: every audience loves to see Majesty at play. But tonight Caesar's luck is in, and he wins from Maximus the ring which is to authenticate the lying summons that will bring Lucina to the palace to-morrow. And to-morrow, sure enough, she comes. To the sound of soft music she is conducted through the gilded rooms to meet her husband, and at last confronts the Emperor; the scene ends with his assurance that he means her no harm. Next, we are in an antechamber where the pandars are hopefully kicking their heels; one of their number comes in, feeling a little sick, and tells them that all is well. They are relieved in their several ways, but not one of them is particularly happy. We do well to applaud Shakespeare's handling of the murderers of Clarence; but Fletcher knew his Court, and these four rotten gentlemen are richly sustained through a whole play.

The rape supplies the catalytic moment; thereafter we are in the rapids, but the poet's hand is steady on the helm. No ravings; we bless whatever chance kept the tale from Chapman or Marston, even from Fletcher himself until he knew what was wrong with *The Maid's Tragedy*. The parting of the satisfied Valentinian and the defiled Lucina is done strictly in

character. He warns her not to talk, for her honour's sake; when she threatens to cry for justice he blandly assures her that her cry will not be heard; he, Caesar, *is* justice. Her curses mean nothing to him:

If I have done a sin, curse her that drew me,
Curse the first cause, the witchcraft that abused me,
Curse those fair eyes, and curse that heavenly beauty,
And curse your being good, too.

The play grips because there is hardly a scene in it that is not rich in the opposition, suspense and surprise that are the stuff of drama. In the debate whether Lucina shall live or die, not only are two loyalties in conflict but (it is the secret of Virginia's, of Lucretia's, immortality in legend) stoic honour stands firm against the promptings of the heart. The impetuous Lucina and the sage Aecius grow in stature through this scene; it is only the actor who plays Maximus who can tell us how far, even in that moment of anguish, ambition is beginning to stir in him. However that may be, when next the two friends meet it is alive, and Aecius is already marked for liquidation; there is veiled conflict between them and veiled suspense in Aecius' not of warning:

Be not rash,
Nor let your angry steel cut those you know not;
For by this fatal blow, if you dare strike it
(As I see great aims in you), those unborn yet,
And those to come of them, and those succeeding,
Shall bleed the wrath of Maximus. For me,
As you now bear yourself, I am your friend still;
If you fall off (I will not flatter you)
And in my hands, were you my soul, you perished.
Once more be careful, stand, and still be worthy:
I'll leave you for this hour.

When the Emperor reappears, that suave hedonist is on the verge of mania, screaming to his creatures to bring Lucina back to life. But observe how the poet makes this situation, a beautifully ironic one, breed another: it is at the very moment of unbalance that suspicion of Aecius is implanted in Valentinian's mind. When Aecius is brought to bay his assailants are too awed to strike, and another must be sent for, an officer cashiered by Aecius and now of the Emperor's party; but this man's new allegiance is not proof against the old, and

the two warriors shake hands and die on their own swords. Always there is opposition, suspense, surprise; this tragedy in fact does not sag towards the end as its predecessor does. It is a moot point whether Maximus should have been left with honour enough in him to voice a panegyric on the friend he has betrayed. But Fletcher certainly denied himself the "solution by massacre" that history afforded; for the real Maximus was torn to pieces by the mob. This Maximus dies more tidily, more economically if more romantically, and more in the manner that excites cleansing horror and pity. It is easy to see how much *Valentinian* owes to Jonson's *Sejanus* and *Cataline*, which it cannot surpass in strength but does surpass in its power to touch the heart; much more than to *Julius Caesar*, although the men who play Valentinian, Aecius and Maximus could undoubtedly have played Antony, Brutus and Cassius. But the truth is that it stands on its own feet as a tragedy in the heroic vein, very little effeminised if at all, startlingly real even to us, yet the product of an unheroic age. It appeared c. 1614, and it may be noteworthy that the author never, single-handed, attempted another work of the same kind.

To Shirley and his contemporaries (he was twenty at the time) this clear and well-knit court tragedy may have seemed a shapelier work than *Antony* or *Lear*; it would be an easy error to fall into when a golden age was merging in an age of silver-gilt that made quite as brave a show. For eleven years to come they were to witness Fletcher's untiring output, his unfailing invention, and were to be entranced by his gaiety and tenderness and by the nimble verse that invests his wildest farce with charm. Compared with Jonson he is a lightweight, but he has a grace that Jonson lacks. He has not Heywood's range of observation, but his fantasy leaves Heywood earth-bound. Unlike Middleton he is an accomplished builder of plays, and when he collaborates the joints are imperceptible. In the handling of impropriety his light touch puts Marston to shame. There is only one poet with whom he will not stand prolonged comparison, and that is the out-moded Shakespeare. He matures as the perfect minister to a satisfied age, an indefatigable purveyor, with appropriate variations of tincture and flavour, of the mixture as before.

It must be remembered that Comedy was a term of very wide application. A farce written in melodious verse was none the less a farce, according to the standards of to-day; and we should not gravely dismiss Fletcher's farcical episodes as instances of a lamentable failure to hold the mirror up to nature. In *The Wild Goose Chase* (1621) Mirabel, "a great

defier of all Ladies in the way of Marriage", is run to earth by the determined Oriana, while his matrimonially-inclined friends are led through a maze of absurdity by her companions. Since several generations roared with laughter at this play (it eventually became Farquhar's *Inconstant*),² need we cavil because the happy ending is brought about by an extreme abuse of the convention of disguise? In *The Pilgrim* of the same year the repeated disguisings verge on the insane; but what matter, if they serve the inter-relation of an angry father, a fugitive daughter, a comic maid and a noble outlaw? *The Pilgrim* is in fact a bad witness for the defence, for some of its scenes are meant to stir the heart; and Fletcher can be much more careful than he is here. In *The Humourous Lieutenant* (1619) Enanthe, the young mistress of the heir-apparent who repels the advances of the king, is seriously and touchingly drawn; she conceals her royal birth, but only from people who do not know her. In *The Elder Brother* (1625) the two sons of Brissac, one a bookworm and one a fop, are again seriously contrasted, and the dawn of the elder's love for his brothers' bride-elect is beautifully shewn; here the only disguising is in a comic scene, and by night. *Rule A Wife and Have A Wife* (1624) magnificently dispenses with disguise altogether. The rich and lovely but polyandrous Margarita marries a reputedly tame young gentleman and finds she has caught a most satisfying tartar; the scheming Perez and Estifania entrap each other into wedlock by a parade of wealth which is not theirs. This is true comedy; its long life in our theatre is testimony to the strength of its scenario and action. On the other hand we do not know whether Fletcher or Massinger was to blame for a sad lapse in *The Custom of the Country* (1620). This is an exciting tale of a young couple who fly to Lisbon to escape the *droit de seigneur* that prevails in some unspecified Italian principality. They and a gallant friend who is prone to wenching survive the manifold perils of a foreign capital, and all ends well. It is in the blending of the sub-action and the main action that the play loses heart. Was it really essential, we have to ask, for the young Duarte, believed to have died in a duel, to visit his grieving mother in the person of a total stranger in order to test her chastity? Yet why should we (who not long ago were greatly exercised about the Fourth Wall) jib at a convention as old and as universal as that of the Chinese property-man? The presumption is that Fletcher's light-hearted public were not for a moment illuded by it but accepted it willingly, provided it led to a playable scene. And we shall find that, as the delight in

the pure art of acting grows, a velvet patch over one eye is to supplant the time-honoured hat and cloak as the impenetrable mask of a husband, a lover or a lifelong friend.

The actors had good reason to thank Fletcher. Unlike Shakespeare, he was not of their calling; but he faithfully and freely supplied them with the means to exhibit their glorious selves. Studied with the actors in mind, the stage and the audience, he reveals himself as an expert who requires a corresponding expertness from his players. If we put together the various guesses we have made as to the style of Alleyn, of Burbage and of Field, we are tempted to a further speculation: that in the third decade of the seventeenth century the playing at the Blackfriars attained a degree of polish that was without precedent. The slighter the matter the greater the need for manner; Shakespeare is less exacting than Fletcher in the conduct of entrances and exits, stage business, in the niceties of timing and the nuances of everyday speech. Considering what tragedies were in the repertory we dare not suppose that as yet there was any loss of power. But there is abundant evidence that the Men of Blackfriars cultivated polish.

Why, then, be so ungracious as to hint that a golden age is giving place to an age of silver-gilt? The acting is as good as ever. Unhappily, it is the drama that is slipping into decline. The change that Shakespeare sensed when he laid down his pen was real. It was not confined to the stage, which perforce reflects contemporary life, and it was not a change for the better. Sinews were slacking, nerves were becoming more tense, standards were falling. We cannot blame Beaumont and Fletcher because they were born to flourish in a theatre that was to rate the manifestations of passion above passion itself, to be indulgent of mellifluous carpet-knights and of gallantry in its less noble meaning. Yet it is perhaps that kind of gallantry that barred them from the full usufruct of their inheritance. There is altogether too much Woman in these plays. This does not mean that they are particularly immoral, but that they suffer from the flabbiness that is immorality in art. Marlowe's strong verse sternly bids women cease trifling and attend; Fletcher's weak verse solicits their approval of a so-far masculine drama that is now prepared to turn even their dishonour to favour and to prettiness: not just once, as in the case of mad Ophelia, but again and again, as if in obedience to a Jacobean *Carte du Tendre*; alternatively to consign it to most exciting flames, stagefire that does not really burn. Too often the women wear their virtue as a masquing dress. The men fare worse. Bussy d'Ambois may be a windbag, but at

least we believe in his sword; it is not a lath in a gaudy scabbard. Some of Fletcher's gentlemen are neither formidable enough for Chapman, flagrant enough for Etherege and Wycherley nor decent and stable enough for Shakespeare. Witty fellows in their cups, one glimpse of a petticoat reduces them to the posture of a *cavaliere servente*; Shirley was to pass such types on to the Restoration stage in the semblance of full men. Love itself is the chief sufferer in these plays that are at any moment ready to proclaim the world well lost for it. Love becomes a little enfeebled by diffusion; there was an extraordinary vogue of promiscuous kissing in high circles at that time, which Fletcher mirrors with seeming approval. And if that was what the Court wanted, why should he not, reserving always his claim as a fine poet? Shakespeare had exhausted the spiritual resources of the drama; Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Lear and Antony had drunk that cellar dry, save for the light wines, or the queer ones, or old ones that needed fortifying. In great plays the age had said nearly all it had to say. Only in poetry could the twins account themselves lords of infinite space.

1625 was a year of plague. Fletcher, it is said, was detained in town by a dilatory tailor, and succumbed to it. He was buried at St Saviour's, Southwark.

Chapter 26

Tourneur, Webster, Ford

OUR PLAYGOING ANCESTORS were especially partial to two elements in their theatre. One was the motive of revenge, another was the bloodshed that revenge almost invariably entailed. The revenge might be nothing less noble than an explosion of the spirit under oppression; the bloodshed may be rationally explained as vicarious sacrifice stemming from the first seed of the drama. But whatever the reason, they delighted in a good hate and, from the inn-yard days when Virginius decapitated his daughter on the stage, they were thirsty for gore. Kyd offered it them in goblets; his Jacobean successors invited them to savour the distillation of that sound, rough wine, in vessels as capacious as ever. Instead of the old hearty flesh-creeping we have more recondite excitement, conveyed to us in extraordinarily subtle verse by poets who can fiddle on the naked nerve; while above broods self-torment as heavy as the murk of Elsinore. The Italy that filled our stage with sunlit romance is now drawn on for alcoves dedicate to lust and intrigue, for dark corridors where torchlight strikes jaggedly on the blade of the assassin. Some responsibility for the change may lie with the players whose art, shaped by Shakespeare to a perfect instrument, must have been perpetually seeking scenes, even moments, that called for topnotes and *bel canto*. In Tourneur, Webster and Ford the actor found three poets willing to ransack hell itself for parts that he could play.

The gulf between old and new is spanned at the upper level by Shakespeare; *Hamlet* shews what a master-mind can do with the revenge theme, and in *Lear* the extremity of physical suffering is irradiated and made significant by the upsurge of the spirit. It is spanned at a much lower level by Marston, who was not greatly concerned with the spirit, and seems to have looked upon the display of pain as a legitimate means of exciting an audience. Those voluptuous stabbings of his found favour, setting a fashion that the elegant Beaumont and Fletcher did not disdain. Pretty flesh is made to bleed deliciously in *Philaster*, even in *The Faithful Shepherdess*; grosser flesh in *The Maid's Tragedy*. It is as though a weakening drama were mistaking shows of brutality for strength. The

jargon of a new science was not at the disposal of the critics whom we still respect; if it had been, we can guess what portentous words they might have used about the Jacobean tragedy of blood.

Cyril Tourneur was born about 1575 and died in 1626.¹ From 1613 onward he would seem to have been in government service abroad; in the year before his death his name appears as secretary to the council of war at Cadiz.² Little else is known of him. Of his extant plays the dates of production are doubtfully fixed between 1606 and 1609; of his best known even the ascription is now challenged. As we are concerned with the works and not with the man, that need not trouble us here.

Decidedly the most earthbound of the three poets, the author of *The Atheist's Tragedy* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* was not the worst craftsman. We need not spend long on the former, which is by far the less considerable of the two. It is ostensibly a moral tale. The Atheist, one Monsieur D'Amville, murders his brothers, seizes his nephew's inheritance and plans the rape of his niece; he comes at last to a bad end by inadvertently dashing out his own brains with a headsman's axe intended for his innocent victims. He survives this mishap just long enough to renounce his materialistic beliefs, and all ends cheerfully. The action is enriched by ghosts, real and sham, by a comic Puritan, and by some spirited love-making in a brothel, in a graveyard, and among the skulls in a charnel-house. From moment to moment it is playable.

It is the charnel-house note that is sounded at the outset of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. The gallant but ill-used Vendice appears nursing what was once the head of his mistress, poisoned by the Duke. The Duke has divers progeny; Lussurioso, his heir by a former marriage; a bastard, Spurio by name; and three sons by his present Duchess, of whom the youngest is in durance for violating a lady of the court, now dead by her own hand. Angered by the Duke's refusal to release her child, the Duchess resolves on incest with his natural son. It is among these explosive elements that Vendice sombrely threads his way. Disguised, he becomes pandar to Lussurioso, and in that capacity lays siege to the virtue of his own sister, but succeeds only in bribing his mother to corrupt her. Notwithstanding that rebuff—which it is only fair to say he privately welcomes—his access to court circles enables him to prosecute his revenge. At the request of the venerable but still lickerish Duke he undertakes to arrange an assignation with a lady

from the country. The lady proves to be the skull aforesaid "dressed up in tires" and with its teeth daubed with venom. Kissing it in the gloom, the Duke expires in convulsions, but not before he has seen (with his tongue nailed to the stage to silence him) his wife and son proceeding to an act of shame. Lussurioso succeeds to the dukedom. In masquing dress Vendice and other conspirators make an end of him; the brothers, arriving in the same garb with the same intent but too late, make an end of each other, and Vendice goes to the block exultant. It has been estimated that in this play there are from fifteen to eighteen deaths by poison, the knife or the axe; but only a round figure can be given, because it is not clear how many noblemen perish in the final blood-letting.

To William Archer *The Revenger's Tragedy* was the work of a sanguinary maniac, who could not even write tolerable verse.³ This must not go uncontroverted. Sanguinary Tourneur certainly was, but if mad he was not without method, and he could write excellent lines of the sort that suited his purpose. As the play begin the ducal train passes over the stage with torches, and when Vendice is alone his voice rises in the stillness like Hamlet's when the court of Denmark has withdrawn; here is unmistakably the same musical effect, and well employed. The bastard Spurio steals something from Shakespeare's Edmund; but he steals well:

Faith, if the truth were known, I was begot
After some gluttonous diner; some stirring dish
Was my first father, when deep healths went round,
And ladies' cheeks were painted red with wine,
Their tongues, as short and nimble as their heels,
Uttering words sweet and thick; and when they rose,
Were merrily disposed to fall again.
In such a whispering and withdrawing hour,
When base male-bawds kept sentinel at stair-head,
Was I stol'n softly.

It is respectable craftsmanship that ends the first act by presenting the wronged lady dead in her bed, her broken husband's recital of her rape and death and, in that hushed chamber, the pact of the conspirators-to-be. Next moment, we want to curse the too easy public that suffered Tourneur to invalidate one of his finest scenes by an impossible and unnecessary disguising; for if he had delved a little deeper into his hero's heart he could have found means by which that victim of obsession might have played proxy to his employer

and have attempted to lure his sister in his own person. Yet the scene as it stands is a fine one, and there is something of Webster's touch in Castiza's rebuke of her corrupted parent:

Mother, come from that poisonous woman there. . . .
Do you not see her? she's too inward, then!

In a later scene there is a reconciliation: Vendice upbraids his mother for having lent (at his solicitation) a readier ear than her daughter to the blandishments of sin and, when she weeps, forgives her. Lamb could not read this, he said, without a sense of personal complicity in the frailty of humankind, ranking its home-truths above those that Hamlet directs to Gertrude's guilty bosom. Archer found in it a nauseating pose of morality cloaking Tourneur's appetite for horrors. We may more coolly mark in it one line that sets us wondering whether Webster, who never went abroad without his notebook, may not have jotted it down. Menaced by the poniards of her sons, Gratiana dissolves in repentant tears, and Vendice observes:

Brother, it rains. 'Twill spoil your dagger: house it.

Between the febrile enthusiasm of Lamb (which Swinburne echoes to the point of according Tourneur an Aeschylean quality) and Archer's dour rejection of the play there is the qualified approval of Addington Symonds. He cannot find in it (how could he?) any mental, moral or spiritual elevation, yet he concedes it a certain vile nobility, applauding the play's balance of evil. Vendice, a lost creature wearing the brands of Lucifer and Cain, does at least trample under his feet the "flat-headed asps" of the court, and achieves a wicked, unhappy greatness. One might add to this that the play exhibits a nice gradation of horror. As a symphony in black it is entitled to rank as a work of art. We should not worry too much because some of it is incredible and much of it revolting; its shape and pace are admirable. The King's Men played it during Burbage's prime and with *Othello* and *Lear* in their recent recollection; they would hardly have done so if they had doubted their ability to make something momentous of it. And not only is *The Revenger's Tragedy* rich in acting points; it also affords opportunity for a succession of beautifully shocking spectacles. We must not neglect the visual aspect of that theatre, nor suppose that prodigious stance and grouping were the discovery of a later age. If a producer seeks pictorial inspiration for his treatment of the Duke's end, he may find it

in one of the more startling martyrdoms of the decadent Spanish school—but he must still work out for himself how to fix his victim's dying gaze on the incestuous Duchess when his tongue has been hammered to the boards. It can be done, if one does not shirk the appropriate contortions.

Archer hazarded one speculation too daring to be passed over. Tourneur may have been a civil servant even in the days when he was a poet, and there is no knowing what a civil servant may be up to in those hours of leisure when he has pen and paper before him and nothing to do. Was it just possible, Archer wondered, that he wrote *The Revenger's Tragedy* with his tongue in cheek?⁴ Delightful, but no; on consideration, no: there is too much music in it.

A John Webster⁵ appears in the roll of the adventurous company of Robert Brown that was ranging Germany at the close of the sixteenth century.⁶ He is conceivably the poet, whose birth has been tentatively dated 1575. Conceivably also John Webster, merchant tailor of London, was his father. But all that is certain about our John Webster is that by 1602 he had found his way into Henslowe's diary and was writing for Worcester's Men.⁷ In that year he appears in collaboration with Chettle, Dekker, Heywood, Middleton and others in plays which are lost; in 1604 with Dekker in *Sir Thomas Wyatt* and *Westward Ho!* and with Marston in *The Malcontent*; in 1605 with Dekker again in *Northward Ho!* It is now questioned whether he had any substantial share in Heywood's *Appius and Virginia* (c. 1609). His immortality rests on *The White Devil* (1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614).

The White Devil, or Vittoria Corombona does not seem to have been an unqualified success when it first appeared. According to Webster's prefatory note it was produced "in so dull a time of winter, presented in so open and black a theatre"—was this the Red Bull?—that it failed to draw "a full and understanding auditory". A further note at the end acknowledges the author's debt to "my friend, Master Parkins" and in general to Queen Anne's, late Worcester's, Men, who performed the play. But it is doubtful whether in ideal conditions the outcome would have been much happier, for to tell the truth this is a congested an ill-proportioned work, in point of stagecraft inferior to *The Revenger's Tragedy*.

The play derives from Italian history, but does not follow it very strictly. The action begins in Rome. Paulo Giordano Ursino, Duke of Brachiano, although blessed by a virtuous Duchess and a hopeful son, conceives an infatuation for Vit-

tor, wife of one Camillo. Her brother Flamineo, who is also Camillo's secretary, plays pandar in the intrigue which develops, despite the protests of their mother, Cornelia, and the remonstrances of Cardinal Monticelso and the Duchess's brother, Francisco de Medicis, Duke of Florence. Camillo and the Duchess are both despatched by Brachiano's agents, but Vittoria is summoned before the Cardinal and is consigned to a penitentiary for harlots. In disguise, she escapes with Brachiano and Flamineo to Padua. Meanwhile Francisco too has succumbed to Vittoria's charm. He summons to his aid an adventurer named Ludovico who loved the dead Duchess and seeks to avenge her, and with him conspires to have Brachiano put out of the way in his turn. In Padua the nuptials of Brachiano and Vittoria proceed. There appear as guests Ludovico and Francisco, the later disguised as a Moorish general. At the ensuing tournament they present the bridegroom with a poisoned casque, wearing which he dies in torment, his departure being hastened by strangulation. Flamineo claims payment from his sister for his services; this refused, he reveals that he has sworn that neither shenor he shall survive Brachiano's death; but after much play with pistols it is Ludovico who makes an end of Flamineo, Vittoria and her maid. Singularly, it is on the instruction of the English Ambassador (who has also attended the wedding) that Ludovico is shot by the guard. Young Giovanni, son to the murdered Duke, assumes the title and gives the necessary orders for the removal of the slain.

This summary omits much detail: the supernatural dumb-shows which inform us of the liquidation of the Duchess and of Camillo; the appearance of the Duchess's spectre to Francisco; a superb scene of jealousy between Brachiano and Vittoria; the College of Cardinals in session and the proclamation of Monticelso as Pope; Ludovico's revelation of his plot under seal of the confessional; the lists at Padua; the exquisite lament of Cornelia; the re-appearance of the dead Brachiano as a ghost, with a skull in his hand. Like Mr Puff's tragedy, *The White Devil* manages to work in a great deal. One suspects that Webster's brain was seething with gorgeous pictures and that he could not bring himself to sacrifice a single one of them, to say nothing of half-a-dozen. As the play pursues its involved course his pen takes charge; it is possible that on that grey and chilly afternoon the audience became restive when they found that the fifth act was nearly twice as long as any other. Also someone—perhaps the experienced Mr Parkins—must have recommended comic relief; for Vittoria's already

overburdened brother is charged with many pungent observations on life in general that are manifest additions to the script.

Why, then, has the play such a reputation? One reason is that it is full of beauty for the ear. The legend of Webster's note-book is credible because again and again we catch in his verse the echo of someone else's. Yet there was nothing shabby in plagiarisings of this kind; it is rather as though he had lighted on some jewel that, in another setting, might look lovelier still. He picked up dutch-metal and turned it into gold; gold and, sometimes, he further refined it. *The White Devil* abounds in furious and splendid language (of the lines to be quoted here *Macbeth* unmistakably prompts one) that does not by any means suffer if, as Lamb did, we lift it from its context. There is Vittoria's first rebuttal of the charge against her:

These are but feigned shadows of my evils:
Terrify babes, my lord, with painted devils;
I am past such needless palsy. For your names
Of whore and murderess, they proceed from you,
As if a man should spit against the wind;
The filth returns in's face.

There is her defiance after sentence, which brought before the highly-strung Elia "the matchless beauty of her face", proof against any conviction of her guilt:

I will not weep;
No, I do scorn to call up one poor tear
To fawn on your injustice; bear me hence
Unto this house of—what's your mitigating title?

MONTICELSO Of convertites.

VITTORIA It shall not be a house of convertites;

My mind shall make it honester to me
Than the Pope's palace, and more peaceable
Than thy soul, though thou art a cardinal
Know this, and let it somewhat raise your spite,
Through darkness diamonds spread their richest
light.

There is the tirade she hurls at the jealous Brachiano—he has learned of Francisco's love for her:

Go, go, brag
How many ladies you have undone like me.
Fare you well, sir; let me hear no more of you:
I had a limb corrupted to an ulcer,
But I have cut it off; and now I'll go
Weeping to Heaven on crutches. For your gifts,
I will return them all; and I do wish
That I could make you full executor
To all my sins. O, that I could toss myself
Into a grave as quickly! for all thou art worth
I'll not shed one tear more,—I'll burst first.

She casts herself on her bed in, needless to say, a storm of tears, completely umanning Brachiano, while the pandaric brother whips up his passion; under a shower of obloquy he plans her escape from the "house of convertites" and promises to make her his duchess. There is not only strong verse here but strong drama, racy, ironic and fruitful of action to come. It is a pity that Vittoria has not, like Cleopatra, a triple empire as setting for her whoredom; more so, perhaps, that she does not quite deserve it. Certainly she is fire and air after Marston's Countess. But she is less an integrated woman than a series of stunning poses, and the last act, which might have drawn them into one, neglects that opportunity. A single gem of utterance is vouchsafed her at the end:

My soul, like to a ship in a black storm,
Is driven, I know not whither.

The doomed Flamineo also is allowed his gesture. Asked what he is thinking of, he replies:

Nothing; of nothing; leave thy idle questions.
I am i' the way to study a long silence:
To prate were idle. I remember nothing.
There's nothing of so infinite vexation
As man's own thoughts.

But in the context these golden lines are cheapened because both characters have been striking flamboyant attitudes with firearms only two minutes before.

A finer play is *The Duchess of Malfi*. Again Webster draws on Italian history. Giovanna, the widowed Duchess of Amalfi, was a real person.⁸ In 1510, being then twenty-two, she eloped with her household-steward, was intercepted by her indignant

brothers and imprisoned, and was presumably done to death, since nothing more is known of her. The steward escaped, but was assassinated a year later. Webster had the tale from Bandello, by way of Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques* and Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*. We shall see how he handles it.

At ground-floor level, any competent modern dramatist could demonstrate how he might have done better. Not at first: Webster is in no doubt how to begin his play. The steward, Antonio, is at once established as a man of character if not of rank, the Duchess as a young great lady, ripe for a mating. Of her two brothers Ferdinand, Duke of Calabria, is sketched as an ill-disposed personage who only laughs heartily "to laugh honesty out of fashion"; a discerning actor will find in him already the taint of madness; his brother the Cardinal is blocked in as a "melancholy churchman" who keeps a mistress and is excessively given to bribery. Before quitting her court both brothers enjoin on their sister a perpetual widowhood, giving no reason but their own wills. By way of ensuring her obedience they plant on her, as Master of the Horse, on Bosola, a hireling whose standards have been impaired by seven years' durance in the galleys; his duty is to spy on her and report.

No sooner have the brothers departed than the headstrong Duchess gives herself to her steward in a brief and touching ceremony of trothplight; only her maid, Cariola, shares the secret. In due course she bears a child; but her farthingale has concealed her condition and the court are kept in ignorance of the event. Bosola alone scents the truth—though not the father's identity—and at once informs his patrons. The news excites Ferdinand to a frenzy; he would, he says,

have their bodies
Burnt in a coal-pit with the ventage stopped,
That their cursed smoke might not ascend to Heaven:
Or dip the sheets they lie in pitch or sulphur,
Wrap them in't and then light them like a match;
Or else boil their bastard to a cullis,
And give't his lecherous father to renew
The sin of his back.

It is a weakness of the play that he resolves to take no action until he knows the father's name, and does not in fact visit his sister until she has had two more children by Antonio. But thereafter there is no slackening. Arrived at Malfi, he allays her fears by hearty assurances of his trust in her; but he pro-

cures from Bosola a duplicate key of her quarters in the castle. That night, after some happy bed-time chatter with her maid and lover, the Duchess turns to her dressing-glass and goes on talking while they, playing a trick on her, steal from the room. Suddenly she sees in the glass her brother, with a dagger in his hand: her secret is out. Superbly she rises and faces him:

'Tis welcome:

For know, whether I am doomed to live or die,
I can do both like a prince.

Ferdinand delivers himself of a torrent of invective, vows never to see her more, and rides off into the night to confer with the Cardinal in Rome.

The Duchess keeps her wits about her and resolves on instant flight. To give colour to Antonio's departure, she there and then summons her household, accuses him of peculation and dismisses him on the spot; her private instruction to him is to make for Ancona, where she and her young, ostensibly on pilgrimage to Loreto, will join him. But the crafty Bosola, by feigning to defend Antonio, wins her confidence and extracts the truth; and when the lovers duly meet at Ancona they find the city barred to them. For safety, they divide forces; Antonio and the eldest boy escape, while the rest of the party are rounded up and brought back to the castle at Malfi, where they are put under lock and key.

Now follow the famous scenes of horror. It may be remarked that they are not as incredible as they are alleged to be if Ferdinand's already hinted madness is at once given full play. Antonio being yet out of his reach, he employs a sculptor to make a waxen image of him and his infant son as if in death. In observance of his vow never to set eyes on her again, he visits his sister in the dark, offers her the handshake of forgiveness, and places in hers a cold hand severed from the effigy, which is thereupon displayed before her eyes. In the last degree of anguish Giovanna's spirit is not broken. A knot of idiots from a neighbouring madhouse are thrust into her presence, but their mouthings cannot shake her reason. Next comes Bosola, habited as the sexton who is to prepare her grave; then the executioners, with cords and bell; still she retains her dignity. When the faithful Cariola is forced from the death-chamber:

I pray thee, look thou giv'st my little boy
Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl

Say her prayers ere she sleep. Now what you
please:
What death?

BOSOLA Strangling; here are your executioners.

DUCHESS I forgive them:

The apoplexy, catarrh, or cough o' the lungs,
Would do as much as they do.

BOSOLA Does not death fright you?

DUCHESS Who would be afraid on't,
Knowing to meet such excellent company
In the other world?

BOSOLA Yet, methinks,

The manner of your death should much afflict
you:

This cord should terrify you.

DUCHESS Not a whit: . . .

I know death hath ten thousand several doors
For men to take their exits; and 'tis found
They go on such strange geometrical hinges,
You may open them both ways; any way, for
Heaven sake,
So I were out of your whispering. . . .

1ST EXECUT. We are ready.

DUCHESS Dispose my breath how please you; but my body
Bestow upon my women, will you?

1ST EXECUT. Yes.

DUCHESS Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength
Must pull down Heaven upon me:—
Yet stay; Heaven-gates are not so highly arched
As princes' palaces; they that enter there
Must go upon their knees (*Kneels*).—Come,
violent death,
Serve for mandragora to make me sleep!—
Go tell my brothers, when I am laid out,
They then may feed in quiet.

(*The EXECUTIONERS strangle the DUCHESS.*)

The children are similarly disposed of, and finally the biting
and scratching Cariola. When all is still Ferdinand creeps in,
and now comes the line that everyone knows:

BOSOLA Do you not weep?

Other sins only speak; murder shrieks out:
The element of water moistens the earth,

But blood flies upwards and bedews the heavens.

FERDINAND Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle: she died young.

He falls into a rhapsody of sadistic grief and wild denunciations of Bosola for doing his bidding; then, stark mad, he quits the scene. The Duchess (like Desdemona) stirs faintly in death. But all the wretched Bosola can do is to tell her of the waxen fraud; she dies in the knowledge that Antonio and her first-born are still living. Murder is now off the leash; in the last act the hapless Antonio, the Cardinal and his mistress, Ferdinand and Bosola all make dreadful ends.

Whatever Webster's standing as a tragic poet, one thing is certain: he is not to be measured by the yardstick commonly applied to Shakespeare. He speaks another language in another climate; it is the language of a wild border-country where Shakespeare's universal passport is still valid, but where Shakespeare does not choose to dwell. Webster lives, by choice, on the fringe of dreamland; not for him the sunlit substance of life, rather its shadow. He likes to follow the human soul on the strange journeys that it makes when sleep has set it free, exchanging one kind of actuality for another no less potent, for the most illogical of dreams can be very real. And just as in a dream familiar bodily shapes perform an odd drama whose purpose is to refresh the spirit by liberating it from the bondage of fact and reason, so the wraith-like personages of the *Duchess*, solid flesh as the actors are bound to make them, are in part no more than symbols of humanity, linking the seen world with the unseen. Even the Duchess's castle of Malfi is a ghostly place, full of dim nooks and angles, compared with Othello's at Cyprus, where one can almost hear the voices on the parade-ground while Iago is weaving his spell. In Webster the metaphysical strain of *Everyman*, of the *Totentanz*, even of *Faustus*, the medieval awareness of death, are re-emerging in the declining heat of a Renaissance afternoon.

One cannot, then, dispose of *The Duchess of Malfi* by primly cataloguing its affronts to reason. Bosola disguised as a sexton is on one plane absurd; on another he is an appropriate emblem of mortality. Ferdinand, when his eyes have ceased to dazzle at the spectacle of the throttled Giovanna, announces his intention of going out "to hunt the badger by owl-light"; since this is also a deed of darkness it is, by dream-reckoning, a logical thing to do. Antonio on his mission of revenge finds himself in a shadowy courtyard noted for its

echoes, and the echoes, warning echoes, that he hears are all of his dead wife's voice: might not Keats have exulted in this scene? Best of all perhaps is the private meditation of the uneasy Cardinal, who has connived at his sister's murder but has had no direct hand in it:

How tedious is a guilty conscience!
When I look into the fish-ponds in my garden,
Methinks I see a thing armed with a rake,
That seems to strike at me.

What in the name of sanity is this Thing armed with a rake? Yet what, in the name of insanity, could be better? Could there be a more fitting apparition (it is the only one in the play, and we do not see it) for this scavenger's stuff to behold in the placid depths of his own fishing-pool? The trope would be sheer nonsense in any Cardinal's garden that Shakespeare ever envisaged; not so in the walks (bordered no doubt by mandrakes) where Websters' Cardinal takes the air.

Surprisingly, this dream of horror will prove a frigid thing if there is anything dreamlike in the playing. The technique we used for Maeterlinck will not do at all for Webster. Precisely because the theme is a woman's suffering, the treatment must be uncompromisingly male: a too-sympathetic producer and designer could between them wreck the play. Precisely because the events are almost beyond belief, they must be presented as if they were everyday happenings; the magic brew must be concocted of the most ordinary ingredients. There must be no luxuriating in emotion; rather a clear, firm realism must do its work until the astounding line falls on the ear with a convincingness, as Lamb puts it, that only thus could this have happened. The tougher the players, the better; no Bosola should take the stage who cannot bring his galley servitude before our eyes. When the King's Men launched it in 1614 Burbage, their Hamlet, was the Ferdinand; Lowin, sometime their Falstaff, the Bosola. Bosola was Betterton's choice after the Restoration, and Phelps preferred the part to that of Ferdinand, which he played at Sadlers Wells in 1850. This production enjoyed a run, and Miss Glyn made an ineffaceable impression on young Adolphus Ward.⁹ The Phoenix Society mounted the *Duchess* in 1919, and the urbane and sceptical Mr Walkley confessed that its extravagance of horror had not moved him to smile. A distinguished revival during the war of 1939 confirmed the play's enduring power.

The circumstances of Webster's death are not known; it is believed to have occurred in 1634.¹⁰

There is a doggerel couplet which is sometimes cited as evidence of Ford's unsociability—

Deep in a dump John Forde was alone got (? gat),
With folded arms and melancholy hat—

against which we may set Heywood's testimony that he was Jack to his friends.¹¹ But the melancholy hat is significant, a clear reminder that this so-called Elizabethan flourished in the time of Van Dyck; for the Caroline sombrero could be worn all ways, according to temperament and mood.

He is something of an enigma, although the main facts of his life are known.¹² Born in 1586 of an old Devon family, and a grandson of Lord Chief Justice Popham, he entered the Middle Temple in 1602. *Fame's Memorial*, an elegy on Lord Mountjoy, Earl of Devonshire, came out in 1606; it is dedicated to the Earl's maligned widow, and is supposed by some to foreshadow Ford's interest in noble and erring women. His first recorded effort for the theatre was *A Bad Beginning Makes a Good Ending*, done at the Cockpit c. 1612 and destined for page-by-page incineration, with several of his later works, in Warburton's kitchen. In 1621, as we have seen, he joined with Dekker and Rowley in *The Witch of Edmonton*, two years later with Dekker in the masque of *The Sun's Darling*. His first surviving tragi-comedy, *The Lover's Melancholy*, was staged by the King's Men in 1628. Its sentiment is of a hot-house kind and its modish humour has faded; we should hardly ascribe it to the Ford we best know were it not for its touches of wistfulness and the firmness, lucidity and polish of the verse. Ford could take his time; he enjoyed security and respect and was not dependent on his writing for a livelihood. In more than one dedication he alludes to his offering as the work of his leisure hours, and in some of his epilogues he displays a haughty disregard of popular approval. It has even been surmised that he did not relish the society of theatre folk. Without going as far as that, we may guess that his disposition was less forthcoming than sedate. On the other hand, if we saw him only through his tragedies and gave our fancy rein as some Shakespearians do, we might suspect that he was no stranger to the riots of the blood.

Although he has not Ibsen's gift of starting a play when the

story is well-nigh over, Ford has at least a nice apprehension of the moment when to begin. Incest is planted on the stage in the very first scene of *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1627), when Giovanni confesses to the Friar his passion for his sister Annabella. Anyone who cares for *Romeo and Juliet* may be tempted to consign the play to the flames as an infamous perversion of that story for debauched palates: young love corrupt in its essence, a disreputable Paris whom Juliet marries to hide her shame and whose discarded mistress is poisoned at the wedding celebration, a Nurse whose reward for her complicity is to be blinded and burned alive, a Romeo who makes his final appearance brandishing his love's heart on a poniard; it is indeed as though Ford had schemed to serve up a familiar dish with stronger seasoning. There is no Mercutio to grace the action and speed it by his death; only a pale ass in the descent of Master Slender, too slight to merit his violent end. There is disguising, tolerable in comedy but not here; grievance and vengeance alien to the main theme, thickening the plot without enriching it: nothing but ruthless blue-pencilling can free this tragedy of its superfluities. As the final dispenser of justice there is no demigod Prince, but an unscrupulous and grasping Cardinal.

It is better to dismiss all thoughts of Shakespeare. Not only is the melancholy hat the symbol of another age than his, but beneath it here is at work a totally different mind; nor is it the mind of a Tourneur or a Webster. Was there a Calvinist strain in the Fords of Ilslington, loyal to Church and King as the men of Devon were to prove? For if lawless love is Ford's obsession so is the hell that awaits it. Not for a moment does the Friar leave Giovanni in doubt whither he is heading:

Hie to thy father's house; there lock thee fast
Alone within thy chamber; then fall down
On both thy knees and grovel on the ground;
Cry to the heart; wash every word thou utter'st
In tears—and if't be possible—of blood:
Beg Heaven to cleanse the leprosy of lust
That rots thy soul; acknowledge what thou art,
A wretch, a worm, a nothing; weep, sigh, pray
Three times a-day and three times every night:
For seven days' space do this; then, if thou find'st
No change in thy desires, return to me:
I'll think on remedy.

When the young sinners plight their troth, Ford takes an

artist's pride in making the dreadful scene a thing of beauty. Giovanni, twisting the Friar's words, says that he has the Church's sanction. Annabella, discarding her strange secretiveness, pours out her heart. For both it is a moment of sweet solemnity:

ANNABELLA

On my knees,
Brother, even by our mother's dust, I charge you,
Do not betray me to your mirth or hate:
Love me or kill me, brother.

GIOVANNI

On my knees,
Sister, even by my mother's dust, I charge you,
Do not betray me to your mirth or hate:
Love me or kill me, sister.

ANNABELLA You mean good sooth then?

GIOVANNI

In good troth, I do;
And so do you, I hope: say, I'm in earnest.

ANNABELLA I'll swear it, I.

GIOVANNI

And I; and by this kiss,—
Once more, yet once more: now let's rise—
by this,
I would not change this minute for Elysium.
What must we now do?

ANNABELLA

What you will.

GIOVANNI

Come, then;
After so many tears as we have wept,
Let's learn to court in smiles, to kiss, and sleep.

Nemesis takes its course, from the first intimation of pregnancy to the bridal night when Annabella, haled up and down the stage by her hair, mocks her defrauded husband and exults in a lover whose name she refuses to divulge. When at last the game is up Giovanni forestalls human judgment:

Give me your hand: how sweetly life doth run
In these well-coloured veins! how constantly
These palms do promise health! but I could chide
With Nature for this cunning flattery.
Kiss me again:—forgive me.

ANNABELLA

With my heart.

GIOVANNI

Farewell!

ANNABELLA

Will you be gone?

GIOVANNI

Be dark, bright sun,
And make this mid-day night, that thy gilt rays
May not behold a deed will turn their splendour

More sooty than the poets feign their Styx!—
One other kiss, my sister.

ANNABELLA

What means this?

GIOVANNI To save thy fame, and kill thee in a kiss.

Saying the words, he thrusts his dagger into her heart. Every actor worthy to speak these lines knows that, whatever else they may be, they are perfectly of the theatre. The action is at fever-heat and we guess what is to come; but it comes in one of those sudden quietudes and simplicities of which Shakespeare was the accomplished master—a trick copied times out of number, and here by no means badly. There is a great deal of Ford in those few words, in their painting of youth and life so soon to be extinguished, their invocation of darkness, their tenderness, directness and economy: perhaps one should say also their employment for immediate effect. For it must be observed that Giovanni does not save his sister's fame, but in the next scene blazons his guilt and hers. In defence of the exhibition of her reeking heart Ford might plead that no end less shocking would fit his shocking theme.

Love's Sacrifice is assigned to 1627, the year of *'Tis Pity*. Here also is a tale of passion, but of a normal kind, checked on the brink of adultery but none the less fatal to the lovers. The elderly Duke of Pavia has a young Duchess, Bianca, and a young favourite, Fernando. He, overwhelmed by Bianca's beauty, makes advances to her which she indignantly repels. But he has awakened a love stronger than his own, and one night, when the Duke is at his hunting lodge, she steals into Fernando's room and offers herself to him. One condition her honour imposes: at dawn she must kill herself. It is a condition too austere even for the enraptured Fernando, and after many protestations and embraces Bianca leaves him. But a jealous woman and a designing secretary plant suspicion in the Duke's mind: these scenes clearly owe something to *Othello* and invite damaging comparisons. In a transport of jealousy, the Duke slays his Duchess; Fernando proclaims her innocence and takes poison; the penitent Duke dies by his own hand, and the bearers of false report are suitably disposed of. The play is overburdened with minor intrigue, and is marred by an excessively staggering conclusion. But Ford may justly have prided himself on the suspense of that teasing bedroom scene, which culminates in mutual renunciation:

FERNANDO O, me!—Come, come; how many women, pray,

Were ever heard or read of, granted love
And did as you protest you will?

BIANCA

Fernando,

Jest not at my calamity. I kneel:
By these dishevelled hairs, these wretched tears,
By all that is good, if what I speak my heart
Vows not eternally, then think, my lord,
Was ever man sued to me I denied,—
Think me a common and most cunning whore;
And let my sins be written on my grave,
My name rest in reproof!—Do as you list.

FERNANDO I must believe ye,—yet I hope anon
When you are parted from me, you will say
I was a good, cold, easy-spirited man,
Nay, laugh at my simplicity: say, will ye?

BIANCA No, by the faith I owe my bridal vows!
But ever hold thee much, much dearer far
Than all my joys on earth by this chaste kiss . . .
Once more, good rest, sweet!

FERNANDO Your most faithful servant!

The scene of *The Broken Heart* (1629) ¹³ is Sparta, possibly because the poet found congenial matter in the legendary Spartan fortitude. Calantha, daughter of the ailing King Amyclas, is sought in marriage by the Prince of Argos, but prefers the martial Ithocles, her father's commander-in-chief. Ithocles has a sister, Penthea, whose life he has ruined by breaking off her engagement with one Orgilus and marrying her instead to a jealous nincompoop, whose agonies of suspicion furnish comic relief to the play. Penthea goes out of her mind, refuses food, and dies. Orgilus thereupon traps Ithocles in an "engine", otherwise a mechanically-operated chair with closing arms, and stabs him. Concurrently with these two deaths the King expires. Calantha is at a dance when she learns, in three impeccably laconic announcements, that she has lost her father, her friend and her lover. After each successive blow she calmly dances on. As this passage was singled out for particular admiration by Lamb and for particular ridicule by Archer a century later, it may be quoted yet once more:

They dance the first change; during which ARMOSTES enters.

ARMOSTES (*Whispers* CALANTHA) The king your father's dead.

CALANTHA To the other change.

ARMOSTES Is't possible?

They dance the second change.

Enter BASSANES

BASSANES (*Whispers CALANTHA*) O, madam!
Pentheia, poor Pentheia's starved.

CALANTHA Beshrew thee!—
Lead to the next.

BASSANES Amazement dulls my senses.

They dance the third change.

Enter ORGILUS

ORGILUS (*Whispers CALANTHA*) Brave Ithocles is murdered
cruelly.

CALANTHA How dull this music sounds! Strike up more
sprightly;

Our footings are not active like our heart,
Which treads the nimbler measure.

ORGILUS I am thunderstruck.

The last change.

CALANTHA So! Let us breathe awhile. Hath not this motion
Raised fresher colour on our cheeks?

The dance ended, she is hailed Queen. She offers Orgilus his choice of death, and with her approval he opens his veins on the stage. Crowned in the temple, she proposes to the Prince of Argos that he shall reign over the two kingdoms; but as she goes on to specify the appointments under the new regime the horrified onlookers realise that they are witnessing her testament. She turns to her lover's bier and places a ring on his finger:

Thus I new-marry him whose wife I am;
Death shall not separate us. O, my lords,
I but deceived your eyes with antic gesture,
When one news straight came huddling on another
Of death! and death! and death! still I danced forward;
But it struck home, and here, and in an instant.
Be such mere women, who with shrieks and outcries
Can vow a present end to all their sorrows,
Yet live to court new pleasures, and outlive them:
They are the silent griefs which cut the heart-strings;
Let me die smiling.

She calls for a dirge, and as the last note sounds she dies. The episode of the dance transported Lamb, he said, to Calvary; to Archer it was a funeral affectation and an affront to decent

manners. It remains for some great actress of our time to shew which of them was right.

Only once again does Ford display his full tragic power, and that is in the closing scene of *Perkin Warbeck* (1633),¹⁴ a reversion to the mode of the chronicle-history. But, wisely, he is content to stage an episode, not a reign; wisely too he makes his Pretender an heroic victim of delusion whom we can reasonably pity. It is the least involved of all his plays, and the firm verse carries it along with majesty, if not with Marlowe's splendour. In *The Fancies, Chaste and Noble* (1635)¹⁵ he turns again to comedy. The Fancies are a trio of young beauties whom the impotent Marquis of Sienna maintains in what appears to be an abode of pleasure. The virtuous Castamela is lured to the house, but resists his indefinite overtures. When homiletics, equivoque and bawdry have made the most of the situation the Marquis reveals that the establishment is perfectly respectable and that the three pretty creatures are his nieces. In *The Lady's Trial* (1638) little is left for the unjustly defamed Spinella but the crumbs from the table of her tragic predecessors. This is the last we hear of Ford. It is believed that in 1639 he died; although there is a tradition that he lived on for some years in retirement at Ilsington, his family home.

Like Middleton, he was a romantic realist. One of his editors links him with Stendhal and Flaubert; not without reason. Stendhal clothed what he called his "espagnolisme" in a style as dry and exact as that of the *Code Napoléon* on which he founded it; Ford at his most "spanish" moments is at pains to say no more than he must and say it clearly. The hero of *Le Rouge et le Noir* defies the rules by which society is held together; if Ford's Calantha is the least appealing of his great heroines it may be because she alone obeys them. Flaubert took endless trouble over a single phrase; so, certainly, did Ford; there is no echo in his closely packed lines of the light fluency of Fletcher. Flaubert cultivated a cool detachment from his characters; never can we say of Ford, as we sometimes can of Shakespeare, that here is the man himself speaking—save only in his epilogues, when he vouchsafes us a frigid bow and as often as not implies that if we don't like the play it is perfectly immaterial to him.

A realist-romantic, then, before such terms were thought of; not least in his approach to such matters as sin and death, which is rational compared with Tourneur's, logical compared with Webster's. He does not—despite the sanguinary display in *'Tis Pity*—seek horror for horror's sake, nor even entirely

for compassion's sake; rather his quest is truth; he probes the heart in search of the motives which, unchecked, lead to a frightful end. He would have been less satisfied than Webster was with the flaming poses that are all we really see of Victoria Corombona; or perhaps that Giovanna of Malfi should be little more than a guiltless object of malevolence. His Bianca shews us her sinful heart, and we feel for her; his Annabella is consigned to perdition, yet, extenuating nothing, he invites us to forgive her, even if God can not. Coldly and proudly he asserts an artist's right to affirm, or challenge, eternal law.

Chapter 27

Massinger

BY THE WIDE ruling we have adopted Ford in virtue of a lost comedy dated c. 1612 comes just within the category of Shakespeare's contemporaries. Not so Massinger.¹ He was three years older than Ford, and during Shakespeare's final period he was already making his way in an assistant capacity. But it is not until 1619 that he appears as the equal partner of Fletcher, nor until 1621 that he produces a play which is entirely his own.

Philip Massinger was born at Salisbury in 1583.² His father was a gentleman holding a position of trust in the household of the second Earl of Pembroke, and it has been surmised that at Wilton the boy acquired his familiarity with courtly ways. William Herbert, the friend of Shakespeare, succeeded to the earldom in 1601, and according to one account it was with his help that a year later Massinger became a commoner at St Alban's Hall, Oxford. In 1606 he went down without honours, some believe because he had turned Catholic and thereby forfeited his patron's support; the evidence of this is not conclusive. He began his stage apprenticeship in the days of *Cymbeline*, *The Alchemist* and *The Maid's Tragedy*. His association with Fletcher may have started as early as 1609, certainly not much later; by 1619 they were in frequent collaboration. In the same year Massinger joined with Field in *The Fatal Dowry*; in 1621 he produced as his sole work *The Maid of Honour* and *The Woman's Plot*.

Several of his plays are lost; several more fell into the hands of Warburton's nefarious Betsy. The number that went to line her pie-dishes or light her fire is variously given as from seven to nine. It is doubtful how far his fame has suffered by this misfortune. How much should we have lost of Shakespeare if half the plays in the Folio had been no more to us than names—if the Windsor Falstaff had survived but not the Falstaff of Eastcheap, or if we knew Ford and Leontes but not Othello, Imogen but not Beatrice? The deprivation is not of that magnitude; at worst it is likely that we are the poorer by some notable characters, comic or otherwise, and some plays as good as *The Great Duke of Florence*, *The Roman Actor* or *A*

New Way to Pay Old Debts. That is grievous enough; but there is no reason to suppose that Massinger's art ranged further than we know it did. Nor have we lost any quantity of exquisite lines, for he was not given to exquisite lines. If his reputation stands lower than it should it is, oddly enough, because although a considerable poet he is too strong a playwright to oblige the anthologist with many purple patches. He produces nothing to compare with Cornelia's threnody in *The White Devil*. His verse is as fluent as Fletcher's and firmer, but lacks Fletcher's grace; it is as firm as Ford's but has not Ford's heart of passion; it is lucid, rational, in its main flow almost a rhythmic prose. It is an instrument perfectly tuned for a born playwright who was aware of his limitations and was too wise to exceed them. Few poets of his time knew better how to build a play, how to grip with the first words, how to keep a diffuse action going and bring it together in a neat—and preferably happy—ending. He is a master of contemporary stagecraft; one might almost suspect that he worked with chessmen on a board, so certain does he seem to be where his people are and what they are doing. A small point to notice is how often he brings them on two lines before their cue to speak; another his use of the upper stage when a scene on the lower is to be overheard, often so skillfully managed that it would not offend in a realist setting. In such practical details the producer will generally find that Massinger has been thinking for him. But observe also with what art he can set us speculating on what is to come, telling us just enough but no more; for example his frequent device of the whisper as a means of kindling expectation. In *Believe As You List* Antiochus, formerly King of Lower Asia and reported slain in battle, emerges after twenty years' exile with incontestable proofs of his identity, and threatens to become a rallying-point for the enemies of Rome. He is arrested at Callipolis, and his captors' task is to extort from him a false confession that he is an impostor:

FLAMINUS

We must decline

The certain scandal it will draw upon
The Roman government, if he die the man
He is by the most received to be; and therefore,
Till that opinion be removed, we must
Use some quaint practice, that may work upon
His hopes or fears, to draw a free confession
That he was suborned to take on him the name
He still maintains.

METELLUS That, torture will wrest from him;
I know no readier way.

FLAMINIUS If you had seen
His carriage in Carthage and Bithynia,
You would not think so. . . . He hath not tasted
These three days any sustenance, and still
Continues fasting.

METELLUS Keep him to that diet
Some few hours more.

FLAMINIUS I am of opinion rather,
Some competence offered him, and a place of rest,
Where he might spend the remnant of his days
In pleasure and security, might do more
Than fear of death or torture.

METELLUS It may be;
There are such natures; and now I think upon't,
I can help you to a happy instrument
To motion it. Your ear. [*He whispers*]

FLAMINIUS 'Tis wondrous well,
And it may prove fortunate.

METELLUS 'Tis but a trial;
However, I will send for her.

We have learnt just before that a courtesan of great beauty has arrived in the town. It is a mere incident in a strong and moving play, but could it have been more intriguingly handled, or with greater economy?

Of the limitations aforesaid, some were imposed on him and some were his own. He wrote for a living; his dedications acknowledge help from several patrons, and it is on record that once at least he was at his wit's end for a loan. He had therefore no choice but to follow the mode. Of his nineteen surviving plays five are tragedies, six are comedies and eight are tragi-comedies or, as we should say, romantic drama. All but two have a courtly setting, and are clearly aimed at Fletcher's fashionable audience. Of his two domestic comedies one is *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1625), which flagellates a rascally and socially-aspiring mortgagee; the other is *The City Madam* (1632), which more gently derides the pretensions of a merchant's wife and enlarges on the corruption that ensues when a poor man of no principle comes into money. Neither could annoy court circles; both perhaps gave Massinger the satisfaction of trouncing his pet aversions. But there are other plays in which he contrives to please a well-

born audience and at the same time to shew a moral fibre stronger than Fletcher's

Three of them have been adduced in support of the legend that he was of the Roman persuasion, but their testimony is doubtful. Certainly he inveighs now and then against atheism—but rather as godless behaviour in a general sense than as the intellect's rejection of dogma. In *The Virgin Martyr* (1620) Dorothea's ecstasies were moderated no doubt by fear of a censorship that forbade any direct allusion to the Deity. At all events they are less convincing than the fury of her persecutors and the bawdry of the low-life types whom Dekker contributed to the play; nor is there anything very spiritual about the conversions she achieves before and after death. In *The Maid of Honour* (1621) Camiola relinquishes her faithless lover to her rival and takes the veil—but this is her only effective way out of the situation in which she finds herself. *The Renegado* (1624) professedly confronts the Crescent with the Cross. Again there are guarded raptures and facile redemptions, which make a pale shewing against the seduction of the hero by a Mohammedan beauty; the wonder-working Francisco is a very strange Jesuit indeed. On the whole it would be rash to pronounce these plays the work of a devout son of the Church.

One thing however Massinger most assuredly believed in, and that was the theatre. In *The Roman Actor* (1626) he found a theme that was not only certain to draw boxes and pit alike but was entirely congenial to himself. The well-graced Paris, defending his profession with a good deal of help from Heywood's *Apology*, has the ring of truth that Dorothea lacks. Among his serious works this was Massinger's favourite child, the most perfect birth, he said, of his Minerva.

In Paris, a second Roscius, and Domitian, his stage-enamoured Emperor, we have the male protagonists of the tragedy. To them ad Caesar's latest concubine, and it is easy to foretell how the story will unfold. Paris, accused of reflecting too truthfully in his mimic world the corruption of the age, is secure in the Emperor's regard. Obediently he performs before Domitia, the new favourite, and she, already tired of her Imperial lover, takes a fancy to him. She lures him to her presence and invites him to be more man than actor. He loyally resists, but she presses her lips to his and the pair are caught by Domitian. The strumpet is removed and the player and his patron face the inexorable call of honour.

CAESAR O, Paris, Paris! . . . that thy fault had been

With their most ravishing sorrows, and the stage
For ever mourn him, and all such as were
His glad spectators weep his sudden death,
The cause forgotten in his epitaph.

No doubt it was the magnificent theatricality of the Paris episodes that attracted Kean; but they are offset by scenes of tyranny, subjection, cruelty and lust as harsh and real as anything in *Sejanus*. Moreover, here as elsewhere Massinger drops a hint or two that he is casting a critical eye on another age than the Roman. He makes punctilious acknowledgement of the duty of His Majesty's servants in the second year of a new reign, but rather guardedly reserves the player's right to be the mirror of his time. It was on one of his lost plays that, ten years later, the hitherto indulgent Charles scribbled a note to the effect that some words or other were "too insolent", and must be changed.³

It has been well said that he exhibits the seamy side of Fletcher's brocaded world. He is the inheritor of Shakespeare's "bitter" comedies; in his own there is hardly more than one that does not leave something of the after-taste of *Measure for Measure*. But he learned also one of Shakespeare's secrets: that if you cannot make a character likeable you must charge him with theatre magic until he becomes fascinating. Sir Giles Overreach in *A New Way* is a well-nigh perfect creation according to this principle. An extortioner, a bully, a toady and a snob, every time he comes on gives us fresh reason to loathe him, and every time he goes off we wish he would come back. The scene—of spontaneous combustion, one might call it—which makes an end of him still sets actors wondering what the deuce Kean *did*, and why those women fainted in the boxes, even on the stage.

For certainly Massinger relied on the co-operation of the cast whom he faithfully served. The Emperor of the East, in the play of that name, presents his Empress with an apple. When she sends it to his dearest friend (who has gout) he falls a prey to jealousy and orders her arrest and his friend's death. It was the actor who had to invest this queer variant of the handkerchief scene with Asiatic passion and keep the audience from laughing. *The Guardian*, a lively tale of abduction, has for *compère* a senile Priapus with a heart of gold and as filthy a tongue as may be found in the range of Jacobean drama: even by the prevailing canons of taste these aspects of Durazzo may have been hard to reconcile in action. Convention was on the side of the fugitive Prince of Tarentum, who

in *A Very Woman* enters the service of his intended as her confidential but unrecognised slave. In the same capacity the hero of *The Bondman* smuggles himself and his sister into the household of Cleora, who knows them both, his purpose being to promote a rising among the Syracusan helots so that he may win her love by shielding her from their excesses. He is a tremendous fellow, this Pisander *alias* Marullo, given the right man in the part; but he is a posturer compared with the honest and sweet Cleora. The fact is that Massinger, who invoked Minerva as his temperate Muse, has too firm a grip on reality to be perfectly at home in the never-never land of Fletcher. The more his truth will out, the more his dexterity is shewn up. In his romantic drama we are lost in admiration of his resourcefulness and ingenuity. Then the machine creaks, and suddenly we wonder which of these impassioned puppets is the great-great-grandfather of Mr Crummles's Outlaw, who went in disguise to a banquet and said Beware. And when the plot imposes, as it sometimes does, anything particularly abrupt in the way of a change of heart, one cannot help being reminded of the cruel parent whom Nicholas adapted from the French for Mr Lenville. He, as we know, became a reformed character when he heard the clock strike ten.

Often the jar of these conversions is accentuated by Massinger's own clearheadedness, by his refusal to overstep the modesty of nature and let his pen run away with him. Disdaining rant, he denies himself also the noble nonsense that might see him through. At moments of crisis his characters are more prone to self-parade than to self-revelation. When the two are one all is well. When Sir Giles is struck down by paralysis he cries

Some undone widow sits upon mine arm,
And takes away the use of't. . . .

This is good. It is not so good when, earlier in the play, he bares his wicked heart for the benefit of the very man whom he most needs to conciliate. But there are several instances of Massinger's resolve to rationalise the irrational when a touch of rhodomontade, aided by the sublime pose and voice of the actor, might helpfully put our reason to sleep. In *The Bashful Lover* Lorenzo, Duke of Tuscany, makes war on Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua, for love of Gonzaga's daughter Matilda. Victorious, he forswears wedlock and dedicates himself to arms. Confronted with the captive but veiled Matilda he exclaims:

A sudden alteration

and in seventeen cogent lines proceeds to argue the claims of the flesh. Learning who she is, he experiences yet another alteration. He kneels before her, consigns her to his rival, and renounces a conqueror's indemnities. It is about as far in D'Artagnanism as romantic drama can go. Massinger may not have known that the best thing in these scenes is not his careful and fraudulent psychologising, but Gonzaga's stately acceptance of Lorenzo's magnanimity:

I must owe this favour
To the clemency of the old heroic valour,
That spared when it had power to kill; a virtue
Buried long since, but raised out of the grave
By you, to grace this latter age.

In short there is justice in the charge that too many of Massinger's men and women oscillate, and do not grow. In *The Duke of Milan* Carlo Sforza fails to sustain the sublime egoism which decrees that his Duchess shall not outlive him if he falls in battle; instead he returns to assume the mantle of Othello. His Iago is embarrassed by having to be Cassio as well, and to avenge a wronged sister into the bargain. The Duchess, judged by some of her utterances in the course of the play, dies pure in deed but not in thought. In *The Unnatural Combat* a gallant but incestuous Admiral exhibits a conflict of motives that only a thunderbolt from heaven can (and does) resolve. In *The Picture* we are kept guessing with commendable skill, but the guesses must be very wild if they are to be the right ones. Honoria, the virtuous Queen of Hungary, cannot endure to learn from the knightly Mathias that his wife is virtuous too. She therefore resolves to seduce him, in the hope that his Sophia will retaliate by cuckolding him. The tirade that follows is a good example of Massinger's ratiocinative method:

How I burst
With envy, that there lives, besides myself,
One fair and loyal woman! 'twas the end
Of my ambition to be recorded
The only wonder of the age, and shall I
Give way to a competitor? . . . I cannot
Sit down so with mine honour: I will gain
A double victory, by working him

To my desire, and taint her in her honour,
Or lose myself: I have read that sometime poison
Is useful.

The spotless Sophia at once reacts according to plan:

Chastity,
Thou only art a name, and I renounce thee!
I am now a servant to voluptuousness.
Wanton of all degrees and fashions, welcome!
You shall be entertained; and, if I stray,
Let him condemn himself, that led the way.

By the end of Act Five the edifying trio have talked themselves back, rather sententiously, into a state of grace.

But in or about 1627 all the diverse or warring elements in Massinger declared a truce, uniting in the production of *The Great Duke of Florence*. The story is worth relating at some length. Giovanni, nephew of the celebrated Cosimo, is pursuing his studies in the country with his tutor, the noble Charamonte, whose only child is a modest young beauty named Lidia. Their boy and girl attachment is ripening when a courtier arrives, with instructions to bring Giovanni back to Florence. The courtier returns bemused by Lidia's perfections and extols them to the Duke, who is a widower. His curiosity aroused, Cosimo despatches his henchman Sanazarro to make a further inspection. The fact that Sanazarro is plighted to his sovereign's ward, Fiorinda, Duchess of Urbino, avails not against the impact of Lidia; he comes back over head and ears in love, and resolved that his only course is to make a cold and discouraging report of her to the Duke. Giovanni, alarmed by the way things are shaping, agrees to back him up. But unfortunately Giovanni has already opened his heart to Fiorinda, who has promised to do her best to reunite him with his first and only love. There is no time to warn her of the change of plan, and two scenes of perfect comedy follow. No sooner have the conspirators, with admirable nonchalance, cried down the lovely Lidia to the Duke than the well-meaning Fiorinda enters with a request that this paragon of young womanhood may be bidden to court. The fat is in the fire; Cosimo's suspicions are aroused, and he resolves to take horse and see for himself. As a gambler's throw it is contrived that conforms to the less favourable accounts of her. A serving maid obliges; she has a weak head for liquor and fails to play

the part. The wrath of Cosimo is terrible, but gentler counsels prevail; Giovanni gets his Lidia, Sanazarro returns to his Fiorinda; the Duke elects for single blessedness and makes Giovanni his heir.

Not only has this trifle the neatest of patterns; it has also a kind of fragrance, emanating perhaps from the quiet country-house where it begins, and where a grave young beauty unwittingly casts her spell on the palace of the Medici. Lidia has little more to do than justify what is said of her, yet she pervades the play as one of Massinger's undemonstrative good women, and they are by far his best. Also it is charming to see the awesome Cosimo led by the nose, and a relief to encounter none but pleasant people, whose intentions are honourable and whose minds are tolerably clean. We cannot tell in what happy mood Massinger rid himself of the astringency that had so often served as foil to Fletcher's sweetness, and discarded the sham psychologisings that mar his tragi-comedy. He was born too late to walk in Arden, centuries too soon to know what was to be done in the exacting art of farce by young Pinero. His pasteboard Cleopatras are poor things compared with Mrs Tanqueray; yet *The Great Duke of Florence* is as ingeniously put together as *Dandy Dick*. And there are moments when it exhales somethings of the freshness of *As You Like It*.

He died in his sleep, having retired in perfect health, during the night of March 16th, 1639, and was buried, we are told, in Fletcher's grave⁴ in St Saviours, Southwark. No one can presume to say what affections, passions, indignations and wry humours lie hidden behind that gentle but enigmatic face. The epilogue to *The Bashful Lover* (he being then fifty-three and having three years to live) may afford a glimpse of him as the actors knew him:

Pray you, gentlemen, keep your seats; something I would
Deliver to gain favour, if I could,
To us, and the still doubtful author. He,
When I desired an epilogue, answered me,
'Twas to no purpose; he must stand his fate,
Since all entreaties now would come too late;
You being long resolved what you would say
Of him or us, as you rise, or of the play.
A strange old fellow! yet this sullen mood
Would quickly leave him, might it be understood
You part not hence displeased. . . .

Chapter 28

Shirley

AN EARLIER CHAPTER glanced at the minor writers of those years during which the Elizabethan drama reached its apogee. A briefer survey must suffice for those of the decline, since they are less significant. The Caroline playwright's art was comfortably set in its three forms of tragedy, comedy and tragic-comedy. A score of poets, men of letters, courtiers, clergy and plain dramatists kept the King's Men, the Queen's Men and the rest supplied with plays that in the main are forgotten to-day¹: Robert Davenport, the witty and short-lived Thomas Randolph, Henry Glapthorne, Sir John Denham, Richard Lovelace, whose two efforts are both lost; Thomas May, historian of the Long Parliament, who wrote sound tragedy and good verse; Sir John Suckling, soldier, poet and ardent royalist, who in the wars to come raised a troop of horse at his own charge, and whose *Aglaure* is still remembered; Sir William Berkeley, later Governor of Virginia, who achieved a passable tragic-comedy when he was at Charles's court; Lodowick Carlell, another court poet; William Cartwright, an Oxford Proctor; Jasper Mayne, a clergyman; Shackerley Marmion, an officer in the forces of the crown.

Among the theatre men we may mark a Henry Shirley, not to be confused with the other of that surname, and more particularly the prolific Richard Brome. Servant, friend and disciple of Ben Jonson, he had over twenty plays to his name when the suppression of the theatres put an end to his career. Four are in the tragic-comic form, and in them the imitation of Middleton and Fletcher is observable. In his comedies, on which his reputation chiefly rests, Jonson is so manifestly the model that they have been unkindly described as the sweepings of the great man's study. For all that, Brome was a skilled contriver of plots, and might have attained more individual distinction had fate not intervered.

But two other names were destined to stand high in theatre history. In attendance on the throne was the lively Thomas Killigrew. Stage-struck from boyhood, he had three plays to his credit when the King withdrew from London; he shared his young prince's exile and came home at last to build the

Theatre Royal in Bridges Street. No less faithful when the blow fell was William D'Avenant, poet laureate in succession to Jonson, who for twelve years had been pleasing the courtly taste in Fletcher's vein. A dozen plays were his, and five masques, including *Salmacida Spolia*. Already he was thinking of a playhouse that should combine the attractions of both forms of entertainment; it took shape eventually as the Duke's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields.

The most considerable figure of these closing years is James Shirley. If Massinger has been denied his rightful place, so has he. As the last of the line, he might be supposed to represent the final stage of a decadence that had begun, arguably, in the latest work of Shakespeare himself, and was undoubtedly setting in during the heyday of Beaumont and Fletcher. He invites the retrospective censure of the Whig historians because he reflected and pleased a Stuart world, and Dryden jeered at him. Even his portrait confirms our notion of him as a rather limp young man who (so the tale goes) was dissuaded from taking orders because a mole on his cheek was lively to hinder his preferment. In fact he did take orders, turned schoolmaster, was received into the Roman faith, and became a prolific writer of powerful, charming and salacious plays.

James Shirley² was born in London in 1596, and proceeded by way of Merchant Taylors' School to St John's College, Oxford. Transferring to Cambridge, he graduated at St Catherine's and made his first mark as a poet. He was ordained, and was appointed to a living near St Albans. In 1623 he became a master at the local Grammar School, having changed his creed and resigned his benefice. In 1625 the Lady Elizabeth's Men scored a success with his first comedy, *Love Tricks*, and this emboldened him to relinquish a distasteful calling and set up as playwright, with quarters in Gray's Inn. It was the year of Charles's accession, and Shirley was appointed the "servant" of his consort. For ten years he wrote continuously for Queen Henrietta's Men; between 1636 and 1640 he was working for his friend Ogilby at the new Werburgh Street Theatre in Dublin, under the patronage of Lord Kildare³; returning, he became poet to the King's Men. On the outbreak of the Civil War he "took his fortune" abroad with his friend and patron the Earl of Newcastle; we do not know what became of his wife and children. Creeping back when the royal cause was lost, he resumed his teaching and kept his heart up by editing his beloved Beaumont and Fletcher⁴; at the Restoration he had the satisfaction of seeing

his plays revived. Together with his second wife, he died of shock and exposure during the Great Fire.

As the fruit of seventeen years of unremitting industry he left behind him more than thirty plays, of remarkably uniform quality and, it seems, almost uniformly successful. It is not easy to agree what constitutes decadence in art, and we had better avoid the word altogether if we wish to see Shirley as he appeared to his contemporaries. To them he was the constant upholder of a standard that lesser men around him were letting slip. Not only, they would have said, was he the perfect mirror of his time, but he drew on whatever was best in his turbulent predecessors and polished it, discarding their haphazardness and violence. It might be difficult to persuade the classically-minded French that Shakespeare was anything better than an inspired boor; Shirley was a living proof that riotous fathers can beget well-conducted children. Massinger extolled him, and Ford predicted his immortality.

He did not, after all, come very belatedly upon the scene; the whole era was only of two generations. In 1625, when *Love Tricks* established him, Shakespeare had been dead nine years, but Jonson had twelve to live; Dekker and Heywood were still active; Middleton's *Game at Chess* was a year-old scandal; Fletcher, Webster, Ford and Massinger had some of their best work still to do. Yet, born when he was, Shirley was subject to powerful influences. His first published poem suggests that he knew his Spenser, his Marlowe and his Shakespeare, for *Narcissus*, a charming imitation of *Venus and Adonis*, has a dash of all three. In his plays there is hardly a man of the great school whom he does not echo. The wonder is that, doomed as we might think to be a copyist, in certain respects he betters his examples. In his comedy he clothes Jonson's "humours" with the verisimilitude of Dekker and the grace of Fletcher, and brings Caroline London before our eyes, with all its apparatus of call-playing, card-playing, party-giving, sittings to Mr Van Dyck, race-meetings, haberdashery and light love. His models for tragedy would seem to have been Middleton, Tourneur, Webster and, as to construction, perhaps Massinger. Middleton he outclasses, save in insight and the power to create atmosphere. In *The Traitor* his Schiarrha is a more credible figure than Tourneur's Vendice, and the Duke's ghastly assignation with a dead woman is a legitimate stroke of art compared with the episode of the dressed-up skull, and quite as affrighting as the waxworks of *The Duchess of Malfi*. Faced with Isabella's dilemma in *Measure For Measure*, the chaste Amidea has died by her brother's hand. To entrap the

FLORIO Pleasures crown
Your expectation!

DUKE All perfect; till this minute, I could never
Boast I was happy: all this world has not
A blessing to exchange: this world! 'tis Heaven;
And thus I take possession of my saint:
(*Goes up to the bed.*
Asleep already? 'twere great pity to
Disturb her dream, yet if her sould be not
Tired with the body's weight, it must convey
Into her slumbers I wait here, and thus
Seal my devotion. (*Kisses the corpse.*)—What
winter dwells
Upon this lip! 'twas no warm kiss; I'll try
Again—(*Kisses it again.*)—the snow is not so cold;
I have
Drunk ice, . . .

He discovers the truth and cries wildly for help; the conspirators enter and despatch him. This play is well built, and although there are some surprising changes of attitude for the sake of stage effect, in a drama of court intrigue where no man dares shew his hand they bother us less than Massinger's changes of heart; the machinery is better oiled and it does not creak. *The Cardinal*, which in 1641 set its seal on the tragic stage, borrows little more from Webster than a theme of afflicted womanhood and ecclesiastical villainy. Massinger might have handled it, yet it is something more than the title-page that stamps it as Shirley's own.

Now, if Shirley had anticipated the verdict of a later age and had embraced his destiny as a decadent, he would have bettered his examples in quite another way. He would have threatened the world with still higher, more astounding terms. He would have thought out further tricks for a Vendice to play, further torments for a frantic Duchess; he had ingenuity enough to devise endless variations on either theme. Yet this he did not do. Instead, his tragedies display a relative sobriety and decorum that may have disappointed the greedier elements in his audience. But he wrote only six, being doubtless aware that neither he nor his age could produce a Lear or an Iago. He may not have consciously applied to his own case Aristotle's ruling that you can make tragedy only out of heroic people, and that if your characters fall short in that respect comedy is their proper sphere. But such heroism as was displayed in Shirley's day was mostly of an unattractive descrip-

tion. The odious Prynne, bleeding in the pillory for his reflections on a play-loving Queen, had more hero-stuff in him than the avenging Schiarrha or Hernando. Moreover Shirley admired with all his heart the accomplished and amoral Fletcher. And however gratifying it might be when the actors spread their plumage in his tragedies, the softer vein of tragi-comedy was more to the taste of the time; still more was comedy itself.

Anyone who seeks to feel the impact of Shirley's comedy as it was felt by a fashionable audience in the sixteen-thirties might turn for a comparison to some brilliant first night of half a century ago, when an expert cast, served by a playwright who still acknowledged an art older than his own, would hold the house in thrall simply by doing with the utmost polish things that had been done a hundred times before. For Shirley, like Fletcher, wrote from first to last with a perfect understanding of a player's needs. There was no knitting of brows at the Cockpit or Blackfriars when his scripts came in.

Nothing stands in the way of a revival of *Hyde Park* (pale reflex of Arden and Windsor forest!) save that a good deal of its social chat is more removed from our time than the slang of Dekker's 'prentices. A topical piece, celebrating the opening of the park to the public by Lord Holland, it holds its place, if only on the shelf, by its vitality. It still sparkles; in 1632 it must have been positively dazzling in its up-to-date-ness. The racing scenes, not yet enhanced as one day they were to be by the introduction of real horses, carry us forward to the Newmarket of Charles II. And most dexterously interwoven with their unflagging activity are the twisted love-affairs of a supposed widow who has married again and whose first husband turns up at her second wedding, of a sharp-tongued but amorous daughter of Shakespeare's Beatrice, and of a sporting and questing peer, as to whom another character remarks that it is

no shame for men
Of his high birth to love a wench; his honour
May privilege more sins: next to a woman,
He loves a running horse.—
Setting aside these recreations,
He has a noble nature, valiant, bountiful.

The only weakness of the play is its concession to morality: Lord Bonville, who has been up to no good for several acts, is sedately rebuked in the fifth and is consoled at once with the

hand of the young lady whom he has been tentatively seeking to undo.

Eleventh-hour absolutions of this kind were to become common form after Jeremy Collier's onslaught in 1698; Shirley anticipates them. *The Witty Fair One* appeared four years before *Hyde Park*. It opens, one might almost say, in the reign of good Queen Anne; if there are any satyrs lurking behind the trim hedge of Mr Worthy's garden they are very harmless ones. Then, with no more warning than a modicum of smut, we seem to be plunged into Restoration farce. The resilient Mr Fowler advances his designs on Penelope by methods that Wycherley would not have rejected, and lands himself in a predicament that certainly inspired Mrs Aphra Behn. Having been reduced to the indignity of untrussing in the dark for an encounter with a maid who insists that he shall oblige her before her mistress, Mr Fowler sees the error of his ways and, as he puts it, "wakes to virtue"; his reward is the same as Lord Bonville's four years later. To the school which rates Congreve above his fellow comic dramatists because he alone evinces no moral sense at all, it is a grave blemish in Shirley that, wherever his libidinous fancy goes blackberrying, it comes home in time for tea. Such however was not the view of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels and Censor of plays, who a year after *Hyde Park* licensed *The Young Admiral* with a special commendation of its freedom from obscenity and an admonition to Mr Shirley to continue in the same paths.

It is not everyone who will agree with Sir Henry as to the blamelessness of *The Young Admiral*, or even that Shirley followed his counsel with any great ardour. His penultimate comedy, *The Brothers* (1641) is a perfectly proper, and charming, tale of scheming fathers, self-willed sons, desirable virgins and thwarted love that comes right in the end. But his best is *The Lady of Pleasure*, and in this light classic, only two years after receiving the Master's commendation, he contrives to portray very seductively the vanities of a delightful world and at the same time to discourage us from pursuing them. Lady Bornwell, who might be a distant ancestress of Lady Teazle if she herself were not well-connected, is sick of life in the shires and yearns for the glitter of London. Sir Thomas, her wealthy spouse, resolves to let her have her fling and see what it amounts to. Not very much, he warn her, in

this wild town composed of noise and charge.

LADY BORNWELL What charge, more than is necessary for
A lady of my birth and education?

BORNWELL I am not ignorant how much nobility
Flows in your blood; your kinsmen great and powerful
I' the state; but with this, lose not you memory
Of being my wife.

He proceeds to inveigh against her extravagance, giving us something like Hogarth's picture of the world of fashion:

Your change of gaudy furniture and pictures
Of this Italian master, and that Dutchman;
Your mighty looking-glasses . . . the superfluous plate,
Antique and novel; vanities of tires;
Fourscore-pound suppers for my lord, your kinsman.
Banquets for t'other lady aunt, and cousins,
And perfumes that exceed all: train of servants,
To stifle us at home, and show abroad
More motley than the French or the Venetian,
About your coach.

He pours scorn on her prodigality in dress and her naive belief that she is as yet experienced enough to look

through the subtilty of cards
And mysteries of dice;

and from that kind of gaming he comes to the root of the matter:

Another game you have, which consumes more
Your fame than purse; your revels in the night,
Your meetings called the Ball, to which repair,
As to the court of pleasure, all your gallants,
And ladies, thither bound by a subpoena
Of Venus, and small Cupid's high displeasure . . .
My thoughts acquit you for dishonouring me
By any foul act; but the virtuous know,
'Tis not enough to clear ourselves, but the
Suspensions of our shame.

LADY BORNWELL

Your lecture?

Have you concluded

Finding her of this mind, he shrugs his shoulders and pretends to abet her by turning spendthrift himself. But when at last his Aretina is abject at the thought that she has imperilled her husband's honour and ruined him into the bargain, he is able

to reassure her: they have still enough left to live on if they do not play the fool. In Aretina's tortuous pilgrimage we are shewn every facet of the kind of life that the Puritans were ever more loudly deploring. If any of that ilk read the play—which is improbable—they must have pronounced it an olive-branch extended by Satan himself. For its most engaging feature is the pursuit of a very young widow by a nobleman who for some covert reason is called Lord A. This Lord A. is a perfectionist incapable of ruining any girl whom he does not respect; moreover he is faithful to the memory of a dead mistress. Lured from this allegiance by the beauty, gaiety and probity of the sixteen-year-old Celestina, he makes her repeated proposals, all of them irregular and all politely rejected. Fletcher himself could not have put his final appeal more urbanely:

Consent to be my mistress, Celestina,
And we will have it spring-time all the year . . .

But Celestina does not consent. Most ingeniously she puts the case of an imaginary aspirant to honours who would pay handsomely for a quartering from his lordship's coat of arms.

Lord A. is appalled:

LORD

Sell my arms!

I cannot madam.

CELESTINA

Give but your consent,

You know not how the state may be inclined

To dispensation; we may prevail

Upon the Heralds' office afterward.

Celestina, with more honesty and affection than disdain, wins him to blushes by explaining the analogy: her honour means as much to her as his escutcheon does to him. At the end of the play they do not mate, but we are left with a hope that they will.

Lord A. and Lord Bonville are remarkable products of Shirley's muse. The latter was no doubt a composite portrait; but if Lord A. was not drawn from the life why was he so mysteriously named? Both stand out from their silken background with a vividness that no-one can deny. And from this follows a momentous conclusion: the supposedly decadent Shirley was something more than a diluter of the bygone glory, something better than Shakespeare-and-water, Jonson-and-water, Fletcher-and-water and so on through all his manifold

inheritance. A touch of Master Fenton, who smelled April and May, touches of Falconbridge and Bobadil, of Benedick and Bussy, all clothed in Fletcher's elegance: together these cumulative touches produce, in Shirley's hands, the rake-hell gentleman in pursuit of ladies who is his major contribution to the drama of the Restoration. Not a very high type, perhaps, but for what he is worth Shirley has got him. No actor should attempt a light love scene without keeping him in mind.

But if real passion is what the scene demands the actor will do better to seek earlier or later examples. It must be conceded to the disparagers of Shirley that he thinks of love between men and women as the food of music, and cheerfully plays on until the appetite indeed begins to sicken. It is a tragic or comic toy. His pleasant people stroke and tease their senses far beyond the point at which a genuine Elizabethan would have notched another maidenhead to his credit and sailed off to scour the Spanish main. Shirley's gay dogs cling loyally to Whitehall, and their bark is so melodious that only very good acting can make us believe in their bite. It is always a puzzle why the fortuitous couplings of Restoration comedy so seldom seem to produce any babies. Shirley affords us a clue. His conquering males have already expended their vital force in conceits and imaginative raptures. Preoccupied with delicious approach-shots, when they arrive on the green they find no strength left in them. But the old god whom theatre people serve is, among other things, the god of fertility; and to that aspect of him, it must be confessed, the comedy of Shirley makes a rather insipid oblation.

There is much to be learnt from the processes of a transition period. Reading Shirley, we discover that the theatre of the Restoration is already taking shape, twenty years before the date assigned it, and that its comedy is an indigenous product, not the importation of an exiled court on its return from sojourning among the wicked folk abroad. It is true that Shirley is no Etherege: he enjoyed the favor of a highly principled king and queen who fostered the arts. But interpose two decades of suppression, let elegance then give place to raffishness, and how easily Lord Bonville and Lord A. will find their counterparts on a less airy plane.

One other thing may be remarked about these plays: they seem to be getting further and further away from the people. Soon the people were to make their presence felt. To the theatre, which has ever thriven by not taking overmuch thought for the morrow, this strange alienation from the life around it would seem to have been a matter of indifference.

Old Lowin may have sighed for robuster days, but there were still good parts to play. And before night descended the theatre had sown the seeds of continuity. It was not such a very long night, after all; only eighteen years. Things had been much worse, once, for the servants of Dionysus.

Chapter 29

The Adversary

TO ARTISTS—ACTORS among them—Puritanism is not a matter of creed. The Puritan may be anything from an Early Father to a godless Marxian; whatever his persuasion, the artist senses in him something alien to himself. The issue between them is one of temperament, of poise, of the balance to be held between the impulses and restraints that are in us all; in short, they will never agree as to what constitutes sin. The Puritan is, to artists, like a singer with a tight throat, or a draughtsman who works with rule and set-square and cannot draw freehand; a musclebound type who will never be altogether himself because he cannot let himself go. It is not a perfectly comprehensive judgment, as appears whenever the Puritans produce an unchallengeable artist of their own. But it is serviceable enough when a strait sect turns militant, imposing its own limitations on other people and curbing the artist's full expression of the divinity that, as he believes, speaks through him. It certainly served for the Elizabethan actor, whose instinctive antipathy was abundantly rationalised by the Puritan's open resolve to do away with him. Sir Andrew Aguecheek was voicing the professional view when he observed that if he thought Malvolio was a Puritan he'd beat him like a dog. But, again, this simple notion of a spoil-sport and a menace to the drama does not carry us very far toward an understanding of the men whose closing of the playhouses was, at the time, a relatively unimportant manifestation of their power.

The Puritanism to be considered here was a product of the Reformation; it became a political force through the working of certain changes in our economy and social structure. The transfer of sovereignty in matters of faith from the Papacy to the Throne was acceptable to many Englishmen as a declaration of their independence. But the inevitable sequel, when the counter-Reformation had come and gone, was a no less vigorous assertion of their individual rights by Protestant communities within the realm. The Church of England, as established by Elizabeth mid-way between Rome and Geneva, attempted to draw together in the bonds of a rough compromise a number of unruly sects which inherited the courage and inflexibility

of the Protestant martyrs. While the external menace of Spain held, they were as loyal to the Crown as they were troublesome. But the Reformation had not as yet reformed medieval thinking. The *alte böse Feind* of the Lutheran hymn was a very real and personal Devil, whose field of temptation was now geratly enlarged. There were deep heart-searchings and discontents because the vestments and prayer-book of the new Church still smacked of the usages of Rome. Within a year of the scattering of the Armada the pseudonymous Martin Marprelate, equipped with a portable printing-press, was inveighing against Church government and Church abuses. Half a century later the same rebellious spirit flared up against the discipline of Archbishop Laud; men were prepared to die and kill rather than surrender their right to set God's table wherever in the church they thought best. It burned with unchecked fury in Cromwell's fanatics, who styled themselves the Saints. The mechanised religions that we know as ideologies do not animate their adherents with greater fervour.

There was no reason why Protestants in general should be hostile to the theatre. It embodied the humanism that they acknowledged, and vaguely respected the old learning. Even the monks had appreciated Terence, without realising that his comedies were written to be played. Calvin, surprising as it may seem, had been induced to countenance theatricals of a kind in Geneva. The ferocious Bishop Bale had employed the theatre freely as a weapon of Protestant propaganda. When the scurrilous Marprelate assailed the Episcopacy, Richard Bancroft, Canon of Westminster, inspired counter-scurrilities from the pens of Nashe and Lyly, and the imaginary figure was lampooned upon the boards.

But the cultivated and easily-circumstanced Anglican of that day was as different a person from the passionate and not always educated Nonconformist as he was from the zealots of another stamp who met at Little Gidding. To the Nonconformist, navigating shoal-water with a home-made compass, there was perdition in any emotion, particularly in any agreeable emotion, that was not the direct and special gift of a God of whom he could approve. As to agreeable emotion his God was stern and precise. All the arts were so many charms of Satan, and to the splendid and increasing potency of theatre magic both temperament and policy dictated than the Nonconformist must be implacably opposed.

There is a sad irony in this opposition. The difference between the artist and the saint is that, while both are strivers for perfection, the saint's work of art is the perfecting of his own

soul. Yet both have much in common: the surrender of the spirit to a power beyond itself, the ecstasy of possession, the glory of fulfilment, the humility that must at once follow if he is not to be lost in the limbo of his own self-sufficiency—these are things familiar to many an artist, and they are not dissimilar from religious experience. Unhappily, in these times too few saints or artists seems to have been aware of any such mutual affinity. Shakespeare must have perceived it, Marlowe, perhaps, so also Webster and Ford in their exploration of the abyss. A Milton could desolve the antagonism, high up

in regions calm of pure and serene air
Above the smoke and stir of that dim sport
That men call earth—

sublimating his own desires in the mouth of an enchanter and rivalling Webster's sharp touch in the last line:

What need a vermeil-tinctured lip for that,
Love-darting eyes, or tresses like the morn?
There was another meaning in these gifts;
Think what, and be advised: you are but young yet.

But *Comus*, that lovely blending of masque and moral interlude, is not pure theatre.

The actor seems to have known very little of Puritanism as a spiritual aristocracy; his concern, as he saw it, was with the mechanical salt-butter rogues of the City of London. The era of Elizabeth had not only seen the dissolution of feudal ties and of a society in which the priest had been the arbiter of conduct, even in business; it witnessed the emergence of a new nobility of wealth and a hard-working and canny middle class. Moreover there was financial disequilibrium. Usury, once frowned on by the church, was now legalised, flourishing particularly in the pawnshops where feckless gentlemen expiated their lust for finery. The purchasing power of the pound was declining; it was a bad time for *rentiers*, including the Queen herself, and a good one for traders, large and small. Such men, sturdy, narrow, self-reliant and self-seeking, impatient of the restraints of church and state, were to become the backbone of political Puritanism. In religion they found Calvin more congenial than Luther, the Old Testament than the New; the Mosaic law was more compatible than any gentler ruling with a code by which godliness and hard dealing combined were to pay a dividend in this world as well as the next. Brooding over

past wrongs, they drew refreshment from the history of another oppressed but chosen people. To that history the Puritan turned not only for his comfort, but for precept and example in his daily life, for the illumination of his thought and feeling, even for his turn of phrase and the strange and forbidding names he gave his children.¹ In its second-rate manifestations the spiritual aristocracy was joyless, smug, myopic, interfering, affected and not a little absurd. If Stiggins and Chadband, the lineal descendants, are fair portraits, so also must be Mr Zeal-of-the-Land Busy in *Bartholomew Fair*.

But that is not how we must picture the Lord Mayor and Corporation of London, as we read their repeated remonstrances with the Privy Council about the nuisance of the stage; rather as level-headed citizens who did not mind being egged on incessantly from the City pulpits because, as a bone of contention between themselves and the Council, the theatre was not without its uses. Every time they waged war on the players, who existed directly or indirectly under Royal protection, they were, in the correctest possible way, making their presence felt. When the Council pointed out that it was necessary for the Queen's solace that the players should be afforded opportunities to "exercise" in public before appearing in the presence, the City could humbly suggest that they should exercise in private—which would mean at the Queen's expense. They could convey, without putting it at all offensively, their regret that Her Majesty's solace should be of a kind abhorrent to her loyal subjects east of Temple Bar. The poor players themselves were as pawns in a never-ending game between the City and the Court.

So far only passing mention has been made of the Puritan opposition. To set forth the whole tale in perspective we ought to have parallel columns, one recording the war of words which raged almost unremittingly between assailants and defenders, another the manoeuvres and counter-manoevres of the City and the Privy Council, and a third column the succession of masterpieces which steadily continued to appear while the turmoil was proceeding. The summary which follows must serve.²

In 1577, a year after the opening of The Theatre and the Curtain in Moorfields, there is a notable onslaught from Thomas White, vicar of St Dunstan's-in-the-West. "Behold," he says, preaching at Paul's Cross in plague-time, "the sumptuous Theatre houses, a continuall monument of London's prodigalities and folly. But I understande they are nowe for-

bidden bycause of the plague. I like the pollicye well if it holde still, for a disease is but bodged or patched up that is not cured in the cause, and the cause of plagues is sinne, if you look to it well: and the cause of sinne are playes: therefore the cause of plagues are playes." From this questionable syllogism he proceeds to speak of "theft and whoredome; pride and prodigality; villanie and blasphemie; these three couples of helhoundes neuer cease barking there (*i.e.* in the play-house), and bite manye, so as they are vncurable ever after". In the same year John Northbrooke, a Gloucester minister, in his *Treatise against Idleness, Idle Pastimes, and Playes*, is disposed to permit occasional school performances, preferably in Latin, privately given and not with "gorgious and suptious apparell" or for gain, but inveighs against the playhouse as the fittest means to the accomplishment of Satan's desire "to bring men and women into his snare of concupiscence and filthie lustes of wicked whoredome;" it is therefore "necessarie that those places, and players, shoulde be forbidden and dissolued, and put downe by authoritie, as the brothell houses and stews are". Next year John Stockwood, Master of Tonbridge Grammar School, laments at Paul's Cross: "Wyll not a fylthye playe, wyth the blast of a Trumpette, sooner call thyther a thousande, than an houres tolling of a Bell, bring to the Sermon a hundred?"; and on the Lord's Day at least he is for the banning of plays (as we still are), together with Morris dancing and the Maygames.

In 1579-80 the attack was reinforced from another quarter by the renegade playwrights Stephen Gosson and Anthony Munday, who joined in it was apostates' fervour. Gosson, later vicar of St Botolph's, led off with *The Schoole of Abuse, Containing a pleasaunt inuective against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Iesters and such like Caterpillars of a Commonwealth*, dedicating it to Sir Philip Sidney, whose comments are not recorded. He confesses his youthful addiction to music, poetry and drama, "all three chayned in linkes of abuse"; he cites the disapproval of the graver Greeks and Romans; with much detail and some relish he enlarges on lascivious goings-on among playgoers who make the theatre "a generall market of bawdrie" — without, he allows, committing "any filthynesse in deede" until after they have left the premises, and on the rich apparel of the players, whose very hirelings at six shillings a week strut "vnder gentlemens noses in sutes of silke"; he acknowledges however that there is virtue in some actors and some plays, notably one or two of his own. Answered by Lodge in *A Defense of Poetry, Music and Stage Plays*, which

upholds the antiquity of the stage and quotes Cicero as to its usefulness as an arbiter of morals, Gosson returns to the charge in *An Apologie for the Schoole of Abuse* with heavy and not very formidable sarcasm: if Diogenes were now alive "hee would wyshe rather to bee a Londoners hounde than his apprentice, bicause hee rateth his dogge, for wallowing in carrion; but rebukes not his seruant for resorting to playes, that are rank poyson". Next on the scene was Munday, whose record as a Protestant spy in Rome is unedifying, and who was shortly to be writing again for the stage. To him is generally ascribed the anonymous *Second and third blast of retrait from plaies and Theaters* of 1580. It is in the vein of the revivalist; the author appears as a penitent, whom the dying confessions of corrupted wives and his own perception that the theatre has "become the consultorie house of Satan" have impelled to the resolve that never will he employ his pen (at least not for some little time, we must interpose) to so vile a purpose. The pleasures of the flesh, the delight of the eye, "the fond motions of the mind" withdraw the heart from the service of God; the City Magistrates must not hesitate to use their powers; they are "not to shrink in the Lord's cause, or to stand in feare to reform abuses of the Common-weale, because of some particular men of auctoritie"—and the writer proceeds to grieve for the misguided noblemen who maintain companies of players. He continues on familiar lines, comparing certain comedies to the sorceries of Celestina the Bawd, and savagely lashing the actors, as loose, he says, in their lives as they are on the stage—"roisters, brallers, ildealers, bosters, lauwers, loiterers, ruffins" (there was in this year an upoar at The Theatre, and some committals); he ends with an appeal to the magistrates to do their duty.

In 1582 back comes Gosson, much more dangerously and with well-marshalled argument, in *Playes confuted in fiue Actions*, largely a further reply to Lodge. The "efficient cause" of plays is the Devil, working upon us through "Italian baudery". The subject-matter of plays — and he thrusts shrewdly at some we have remarked on—is set forth: "The argument of Tragedies is wrath, crueltie, incest, iniurie, murder eyther violent by sworde, or voluntary by poyson. The persons, Gods, Goddesses, furies, fiendes, Kinges, Quenes, and mightie men. The ground work of Commedies, is loue, cosenedge flatterie, bawderie, slye conueighance of whore-dome; The persons, cookes, queanes, knaues, baudes, parasites, courtezannes, lecherous olde men, amorous young men." As for the argument that the theatre is the school of life: "Some-

times you shall see nothing but the adventures of an amorous knight, passing from countrie to countrie for the loue of his lady, encountring many a terrible monster made of brown paper, & at his retorne, is so wonderfully changed, that he can not be knowne, but by some posie in his tablet, or by a broken ring, or by a handkircher, or a piece of a cockle shell. What learne you by that? When ye soule of your playes is eyther meere trifles, or Italian baudery, or wooing of gentlewomen, what are we taught?" Nor are plays the mirror of behaviour, nor the image of truth, when poets feign things that never were, or, procrustes-like, lop and stretch true history as suits them, concentrating on "such pointes as may best shewe the maiestie of their pen in Tragicall speaches; or set the hearers a gogge with discourses of loue; or painte a fewe antickes to fitt their owne humors with scoffes and tauntes". All stage counterfeiting is a lie, and the wearing of women's apparel by men is expressly forbidden by Scripture; the end of plays is carnal delight; and so on and so on. With sundry animadversions on the "sleepiness" of magistrates, markets of bawdry, young men undoing and undone, the disruption of established order by actors who "desire to walke gentleman like in sattine and veluet" and a final threat of divine vengeance (by way of the Plague), the bombardment dies away. But much of Gosson's fire is on the target; we have to remember that *Tamburlaine* and even *The Spanish Tragedy* are still five years ahead, and in some respects his gunnery is not at fault long after they are outdated.

On Sunday, January 13th, 1583, a gallery collapsed at the Bear-pit in Paris Garden, with some loss of life. This mishap prompted an exhortation which was addressed by the Reverend John Field (who four years later was to become the father of a famous actor) to the Lord Mayor, Recorder and Aldermen of the City of London. From the nature of the damage he is able to deduce that this was no accident but the work of an angry Creator; as we are not here concerned with bearbaiting, Field's onslaught is chiefly interesting to us because he foretells similar visitations at The Theatre and the Curtain. But the same year saw the publication of *The Anatomie of Abuses*, by Philip Stubbes, a lay pamphleteer and ballad-maker. Stubbes does not confine himself to the stage; his is the Puritanism of White and Northbrooke, all-embracing in its intolerance, vehemence and sombre fire. He adopts the dialogue form, and sets his two characters, Philoponus for the prosecution and Spudeus for the defence, in the anagrammatic Island of Ailgna. When he turns to the theatre

he draws a good deal on Gosson; indeed he shews generally as an eloquent refurbisher of stock invective. He is of the demagogy of Puritanism, destined to play its part in days to come; he knows his way to the heart of the zealot who also has material expectations in this vale of tears. Hear him: "The Apostle biddeth vs beware, least we communicat with other mens sinnes; & maintain euil to the destruction of them selues & many others, but also a maintaining of a great sorte of idle lubbers, and buzzing dronets, to suck vp and deuoure the good honie, wherupon the poor bees should liue." His righteousness tolerates no half-measures: "Away therfore with this so infamous an art! for goe they neuer so braue, yet are they counted and taken but for beggars. And is it not true? liue they not vpon begging of euery one that comes? Are they not taken by the lawes of the Realm for roagues and vacaboundes?" Wakes, feasts and Church-ales come under his lash, music and "the horrible Vice of pestiferous Dauncing"—a vice to which Her Majesty the Queen was herself much addicted. The recent event at the Bear-pit ("A wofull cry at Syrap Garden"—anagrammatic again) is coupled with the recent earthquake, which shook the theatres as well as other buildings, as an earnest of the Wrath to Come. With a prayer to Jehovah to open the eyes of the magistracy, the diatribe ends; a work exerting some power, surely, among those to whom it was addressed.

In or about this year, above the battle, Sir Philip Sidney set down his view. *The Defence of Poesie* did not appear in print until 1595, eight years after the writer fell at Zutphen, but it is believed to have been an answer to Gosson. As a gentleman, a soldier, a scholar and a poet he shews a poise that still rebukes the too-absolute in any quarrel. He is chiefly solicitous that humanism shall accord the poet his rightful place in the scheme of things, but he glances briefly at the drama. He deprecates, as any man of his quality might well do in 1583, a "mungrell Tragy-comedie" whose eventual flowering was not yet to be foreseen. But he answers Gosson's ground-floor case against Comedy and Tragedy from on high: "Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life," held up to ridicule in a manner salutary for the beholder; Tragedy—he soars far above Gosson's allegation of abominable themes—"openeth the greatest wounds, and sheweth for the Vlcers, that are couered with Tissue"; it "maketh Kinges feare to be Tyrants, and Tyrants manifest their tirannicall humors"; through horror and pity it teaches "the uncertainty of this world, and vpon how weake foundations guilden roofes are

builded". But this sane counsel seems to have circulated only in private for some years after it was given.

Thereafter the records are scanty up to 1588, when Martin Marprelate claimed priority in controversy and the luckless stage, by holding him up to ridicule in public, got still deeper into the bad books of the clerical left. In 1592 Grub Street, as one might say, came to the rescue in the person of Thomas Nashe. In his epistle *To the Gentlemen Students of Both Universities*, which appeared as a preface to Greene's *Menaphon* in 1589, he had free-lanced both against bogus poets and hubristic players who lived on the brains of better men. But in *Pierce Pennilesse his Supplication to the Divell*, a general letting-off of steam by a man of genius who is sick of being poor and undervalued, he is heart and soul for the theatre. At the lowest reckoning, he says, it is a better relaxation than gaming, wenching or drinking, the alternative afternoon amusements of Elizabethan London. But is not playgoing in fact a rare exercise of virtue? He proceeds, knowing his public, by invoking the sound patriotism of the Chronicle plays; it would have given joy to "braue Talbot (the terror of the French) to thinke that after he had lyne two hundred yeares in his Tombe, hee should triumphe againe on the Stage", whereas the money-grubbing usurers of Nonconformity can only fear an institution that will infallibly hold their uncouthness, their malpractices and their dubious coats of arms, up to ridicule when they are dead. The Common Council's argument that the youth and 'prentices of the City are corrupted by the theatre is absurd. They are a rowdy element with which the theatre would gladly dispense; is not some part of the opposition traceable to "Vintners, Alewiues, and Victuallers, who surmise, if there were no Playes, they should haue all the companie that resort to them, lye bowzing and beere-bathing in their houses euery after-noone"? The stately and honourable English players are contrasted with the "squirting baudie Comedians" beyond the sea, who employ whores, not boys, for women's parts; Alleyn, Tarleton, Knell and Bentley should be sent to play abroad, for the confounding of Frenchmen, Spaniards and Italians. The mention of Alleyn reminds us that he has now been playing Tamburlaine for four years, Greene is on the decline and Shakespeare just rising. The theatre is not yet secure, but strong enough to win the support of a combative poet-publicist who loves it, although he himself will never be wholly a theatre man.

Greene's rankling hate of "Anticks garnisht in our colours", including the "vpstart Crow, beautified with our feathers"

who was beginning to write plays for the theatre and in the theatre, is not directed against the institution by which he also lived. And in *Kind-Harts Dreame*, published immediately after Greene's death in 1592, Henry Chettle, also a dramatist, after dissociating himself from Greene's attack on Shakespeare, has a good deal to say in defence of the stage, through the mouth of the universally adored little Tarleton, now four years dead. Tarleton visits him in his dream and most reasonably discourses on the theatre as a counter-attraction to vice, on its essentially moral function, and has a final word for the "wilfull sullen" who "maligne our moderate merriments, and thinke there is no felicitie but in excessiue possession of wealth"; thereby as it seems reminding us that the theatre was at war with Puritanism in all its manifestations.

It is interesting that at this point Sir Edmund Chambers' summary shews a lull of ten years during which the surviving records are of academic rather than popular contention. These years mark the rise of the drama to its full glory; they carry us from Shakespeare's early handling of *Henry VI* through the histories and the great comedies almost to *Othello*. Firmly established, the stage is subduing opposition by producing works of such incontestable vigour and beauty that it will soon dare to be openly derisive of the foe. By 1598 Francis Meres, in *Palladis Tamia: Wit's Treasury*, could set forth a roll of mighty names as "our best for Tragedy", "the best for Comedy", with Shakespeare heading both lists, and quotes a contemporary eulogy of the deceased Tarleton (not Alleyn) as the English Roscius. Five years later, on the other side, there is a reluctant acknowledgment of the theatre's growing prosperity. In 1603 Henry Crosse, in *Vertues Commonwealth*, is fain to storm at "copperlace gentlemen" who "growe rich, purchase lands by adulterous Playes"—Shakespeare had bought New Place six years before. He notes that these "nocturnall and night Playes"—a cut at the private houses—have aggravated the old social evils; he wishes, not very hopefully, "that those admired wittes of this age, Tragaeadians, and Comaedians, that garnish Theatres with their inuentions, would spend their wittes in more profitable studies, and leaue off to maintaine those Anticks, and Puppets, that speake out of their mouthes (has he been looking up Greene?): for it is pittie such noble giftes, should be so basely imployed, as to prostitute their ingenious labours to inriche such buckorome gentlemen".

There is security, too, behind Jonson's preface to *Volpone*. The theatre can now rise with dignity above the dust of the

arena; it welcomes debate, without any shouting-down on either side. Jonson admits freely that the drama has suffered from the excesses of poetasters; but any who consider impartially the function of a true poet must "conclude to themselves the impossibility of any mans being the good *Poet*, without first being a good *Man*". He who can "informe *young-men* to all good disciplines, inflame *growne-men* to all great vertues, keepe *old men* in their best and supreme state, or as they decline to child-hood, recover them to their first strength" is the "Interpreter and Arbiter of *Nature*, a Teacher of things diuine no lesse than humane, a Master in manners; and can alone, or with a few, effect the business of Man-kind"—what *trahisons des clerics* to come are not put to shame by that affirmation? He grants and deplores the current licence of offence to God and man; but to say that every Poet is "em-barqu'd in this bold aduenture for Hell, is a most vncharitable thought, and vttered, a more malicious slander".

Thomas Heywood's *Apology for Actors* (c. 1608) brings the same confidence and dignity to the defence of his calling. He is moved to write by "the sundry exclamations of many seditious sectists in this age"—there had been a partially successful renewal of Puritan agitation, and William Crashaw, father of Richard the poet, had been voluble at the Inner Temple and Paul's Cross. He traces the actor from antiquity, noting the esteem in which he was once held; he contrasts the limited powers of the written word and the painted canvas with that of the living, moving and speaking art of the stage: to see Hector all besmeared in blood, Troilus returning from the field, Caesar and Pompey, Hercules dragging Cerberus in chains—these are experiences which transform the spectator himself to a hero. So too with the worthies of the English Chronicles: "So bewitching a thing is lively and well-spirited action, that it hath power to new-mold the harts of the spectators, and fashion them to the shapes of any noble and notable attempt". Neither Christ nor His Apostles had spoken a word against the theatre; "since God hath provided us of these pastimes, why may we not use them to his glory?" He extols great names of the past, and the recently departed: Knell, Bentley, Mills, Wilson, Crosse, Lanam; Tarleton and Kemp, whom the Queen had favoured; Gabriel, Singer, Pope, Phillips, Sly, and the most famous Alleyn, still living. The Play is a refiner of the English language, an instructor of the ignorant, an inculcator of morality; like Hamlet he recalls how it has driven the guilty to confess their sins; he even reminds his reader (not very relevantly) how the drums and trumpets

of a company playing by night had scared some raiding Spaniards from the Cornish coast. He, too, deploras a growing tendency to scurrility, particularly in the mouths of the child-actors—but he leaves us in no doubt as to the quality of his faith; once again we like Heywood and respect him.

An attack from another angle is that of one J. Cocke on *A common Player* (1615), here presented as having a mind as motley as his shabby finery, not knowing good from bad until his audience tells him, dependent on popular favour despite his royal patronage, and accordingly playing to the gallery. His life is “a Drunkard’s paradise” for the run of the piece, as we should put it, and between times miserable; he is irreprovable, unshamable and sexually confused by playing love-scenes with boys; a “shifting companion; for he lives effectually by putting on, and putting off”, he yet may not be styled a rogue, since he is the chief ornament of His Majesty’s Revels. But it is allowed that many players “may deserve a wise man’s commendation”. One such is so commended in *An Excellent Actor* of the same year. This is ascribed to Webster, and there are indications—the Actor’s naturalness, not making nature monstrous, the music of his voice, his protean quality and his skill with the brush—that Burbage was in the writer’s mind.

Here then is a fairly comprehensive outline of the wordy warfare to the accompaniment of which the theatre of a great age rose, flourished and waned. We can imagine that as it persisted there were fewer and fewer arguments that had not been used already by either side. But the great and most sustainable argument, that the theatre was noble, lovely, humane and indispensable, was left, as the years passed, ever more to the players to proclaim. Meanwhile the enemy’s power was mounting. The strength of the opposition in the reign of Charles I may be gauged from William Prynne’s *Histrionastix: The Players Scourge, or Actors Tragædie* of 1633; its vitriolic title-page epitomises the book. One passage in it was thought to reflect upon the Queen, who not only delighted in masques and plays but had acted with her ladies in a pastoral. For this, and sundry other misdemeanours, Prynne lost his ears, was exposed in the pillory, deprived of his Oxford degrees, expelled from the Bar, branded on the cheeks as a seditious libeller, fined five thousand pounds and sentenced to imprisonment for life; his treatise was publicly burnt. Nevertheless *Histrionastix* is a formidable work, consisting of a thousand pages of well-documented pleading and

expressing the views of a large, influential and moneyed minority of the king's subjects.³

We have seen how, at an earlier stage in its dealings with the City, the Privy Council, having the whip-hand, made a practice of responding to the City's recurrent protests with small concessions and polite evasions. Relying on the specious claim that it existed for the refreshment of the Queen, and could not refresh her suitably if it was not continually in being, the theatre was in fact the protégé of the Council, although the Council, like a good governess, was quick to pounce on any irregularity. But with the death of Elizabeth there came a change in the theatre's status. The patronage of the nobles was gradually superseded by the patronage of the Crown. The Lord Chamberlain's Men became the King's Men, with the royal liveries; Lord Worcester's the Queen's; the Lord Admiral's Prince Henry's, and after his death the Elector Palatine's; there were new companies deriving from the old and holding their patents—royal patents—as the Lady Elizabeth's Men and the Duke of York's Men, later the Prince's. The stage flourished, alike in the playhouses and at court. But the actor, year by year linking his destiny more closely with the fortunes of the throne. Independant he had never been; but now we find him almost entirely dependent on court favour; even in his art he conforms increasingly with the standards of the court. The playwright, on occasion, can be healthily obstreperous; Massinger appears now and then as a cautious critic of affairs. Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels and censor, had as keen an eye for improprieties, political or other, as for the perquisites of his office; he was stricter even than the King, who sometimes took a hand in the blue-pencilling himself, where Elizabeth had been content to storm after the gaffe had been made. He may or may not have been nodding when he missed the diplomatic implications of Middleton's *Game at Chess*, which proved so much to the popular taste that after ten days he had to ban it; but that was long ago. No sudden enfranchisement, now, could save the theatre from the forces that had for so long sought to annihilate it; there was no thinkable emulsion in which such opposites could be held in poise. To everyone in the City of London who hated or mistrusted the court it had become a symbol of the court. If ever the City, backing the parliament men, should drive King Charles from London, the theatre was doomed.

It could hardly help itself. Charles was an enlightened patron of the arts and Henrietta Maria loved plays. Doing

plays handsomely is expensive, and actors do them best when they are secure. It is only in lucky times, when the hearts of a whole people are beating in unison, that the theatre dares dispense with the protection of a cultivated inner circle. But these were not lucky times: a gaudy court, albeit something soberer than James's and blessed by the marital devotion of King and Queen; shabby policy, and a people who were either, as Izaak Walton thought, sick from being too well, or disgruntled and resolved on change. Moreover, the drama was tired out, whatever the actors may have thought; it had spent itself prodigally. It had drained Italy and Spain of plots until there was nothing left but some neat permutation of a stale intrigue; it had said all it had to say about natural love, and was fain to discover what could be made of incest; Ford's reversion to the heroic mode of the chronicle history started no revival; politics and ideas were barred. It had almost used up the priceless Elizabethan treasury of words; there was hardly a new way of arranging them, hardly a marriageable adjective and noun that had not met time and again—for the desperate measures of our day were as yet unknown: one could not, then, write of wooden moons. There was nothing left for the dramatist but technique, style, *panache*; to keep going somehow by ringing the changes, to hold an artfully tinted mirror up to the kind of nature that liked to see itself so, to flatter court ways and laugh at the City, to leave the bucolic heart of England quite out of the picture or doll it up past recognition in the trappings of a faded arcady, to reflect a decline in faith and (the invariable concomitant) a growth of superstition, and to trust that, by some magic of their ancient god and by polished playing, the actors would see him through.

In 1641 the theatre was abruptly made aware that it was a thing of no importance. It was a grim year for actors. There was plague, and a less familiar shadow was looming; they lamented their sad plight in *The Stage Players' Complaint*. The last court performance was at Christmas; it was Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady*, and neither Charles nor his consort were present. At the end of February the King left London; "London is gone to York", was Shirley's comment in the prologue to *The Sisters*, licensed in April. In August Sir Henry Herbert made the last entry in his register, of a play called *The Irish Rebellion*, and closed the book, for war had begun.

The blow, not unexpected, fell on September 2, 1642:

Whereas the distressed Estate of Ireland, steeped in her own Blood, and the distracted Estate of England, threatened with a cloud of Blood, by a Civil Warre, call for all possible means to appease and avert the Wrath of God appearing in these Judgments; amongst which Fasting and Prayer have been often tried to be very effectual, have been lately, and are still enjoined, and whereas publicke Sports doe not well agree with publicke Calamities, nor publicke Stage-playes with the seasons of Humiliation, this being an exercise of sad and pious solemnity, and the other being Spectacles of, too commonly expressing lascivious Mirth and Levitie. It is therefore thought fit, and Ordeined by the Lords and Commons in this Parliament Assembled, that while these sad Causes and set times of Humiliation doe continue, publicke Stage-playes shall cease, and bee foreborne. Instead of which are recommended to the people of this Land, the profitable and seasonable Considerations of Repentance, Reconciliation, and peace with God, which probably may produce outward peace and prosperity, and bring again Times of Joy and Gladness to these Nations.

The stage did not give way altogether; it was to shew, as we shall see, something of its immemorial resilience. *The Actors' Remonstrance* of 1643, addressed not to Authority but to Apollo and the Muses, points out that puppet-shows are still permitted—perhaps because Mr Zeal-of-the-Land Busy had discovered that puppets were sexless—and that bears are still being tormented at Paris Garden. It was a gesture, no more. Edict followed edict; fines, imprisonment and flogging were prescribed; and the sober and substantial gentlemen of the Blackfriars and the Globe again heard the chilling words Rogue and Vagabond. To their eternal honour (or because their case was past finessing) the players maintained their integrity; only one of them discovered that he had been a Presbyterian all the time. Many stage people fought in the Royalist cause, for in truth they had owed much to a kindly patron; and some fell. D'Avenant, returning from abroad to fight, was knighted for valour in the siege of Gloucester and was destined, after many adventures, for a brilliant future. Michael Mohun, emerging as Major Mohun when the trouble was over, was to have a hand in reassembling a scattered little force at the Red Bull. Some took to the road in France and Germany; some toured the English countryside, furtively playing brief excerpts from their scripts, which they called

Drolls. Some tried their hand at other trades; John Rhodes, wardrobe-master (or was he prompter?) of the Blackfriars, set up a book-shop, where he schooled his apprentices in the forbidden art. Some quietly starved. Old Lowin took the Three Pigeons at Brentford, and when he died, says James Wright in his *Historia Histrionica*, his poverty was as great as his age.

Chapter 30

Retrospect

IT IS TIME to draw together the stands of this discursive history.

First, as to the actor. We have seen him emerging from his minstrel status as a player of interludes; consolidating his position in the social scheme as a member of a company under royal or noble patronage, yet still dependant on his own efforts for a living; becoming part-owner of his permanent headquarters. When he vanishes in the shadow of the Commonwealth it is as a highly if not universally respected personage, eligible even for a Churchwardenship, sometimes of substance enough to leave a good property behind him; able to boast that one of his calling has married the daughter of the Dean of St Paul's and founded a public school. We have tried to picture him in action, and have surmised that he was governed by strict rules of style according to the art of rhetoric, and that in comedy particularly he became a performer of great address and polish.

Next, as to the playhouse. We have traced it from the inn-yard to the Globe and beyond, acknowledging how much we have yet to learn of how the plays were done, but guessing that under the candles of Blackfriars the influence of the Masque was soon at work, and that if fate had not ordained otherwise young D'Avenant, armed with his sovereign's patent of 1639, might well have presented London with a scenic stage some twenty years earlier than he did.

Lastly, as to the drama, a far more complex growth. Long before the close of the era it had sorted itself into three distinct kinds of play: tragedy, which ends unhappily; comedy, including what we now call farce; tragi-comedy, which, with as much subsidiary humour as will please, discovers a happy end to a sad story. At the dawn of the era all three were anticipated respectively by *Everyman*, by the racy interludes of John Heywood and, possibly, by Rastell's abortive *Calisto and Melibæa*, Under the stimulus of Renaissance Italy, native tragedy took shape as the stately *Gorboduc*, native comedy as *Ralph Roister Doister*. Between them there flourished confusedly the hotch-potch drama that Sidney deprecated: tales

from chronicle and legend, dramatic where the original was dramatic, dull where it was not, and diversified with sub-action of every conceivable kind. The popular tragedy of revenge and blood rejected the Senecan rules that *Gorboduc* sought to impose, but Kyd accepted as his medium the blank verse which under Marlowe's hand became his chief bequest to Shakespeare. The Plautine construction of *Ralph Roister Doister* taught our nascent comedy how to sustain an intricate and funny tale; that craft came to Shakespeare by way of Greene and Lyly. Out of the miscellaneous chronicle plays arose the epic *Tamburlaine*, casting superfluities aside; Greene's more diffuse and feebler *Alphonsus*; the great Shakespearean cycle of histories; domestic, or broadsheet drama. In Shakespeare all the strands unite, but we note his transit through bitter comedy to tragedy. Jonson's embodied humours, traceable to the abstractions of the morality, to John Heywood's taproom disputants and faintly to the eternal types of the *Commedia dell' Arte*, are also framed in the kind of plot he acquired from Roman comedy; his tragedy, Roman in scene and spirit, achieves what *Gorboduc* set out to do. Chapman follows the epic lead of Marlowe with an eye on Kyd. The ranging Dekker is as observant as John Heywood and selects for preference the cits and 'prentices of whom, with a developing technique at his disposal, he can now make a five-act play. The no less versatile Thomas Heywood carries domestic tragedy to the height of *A Woman Killed With Kindness*. The dark romance of Middleton draws on the tragedy of blood. This Marston has revived, but he is at his best in railing satire. *The Winter's Tale*, a sublimation of the hotch-potch drama beyond Greene's or Sidney's imagining, opens up to Beaumont and Fletcher the realm of tender tragic-comedy; in comedy itself Fletcher's fluency and grace allay any suspicions of a decline. Blood and revenge yield new thrills to Tourneur, Webster and Ford. The able and principled Massinger inherits all the tools of the trade and uses nearly every one of them. The ambrosial Shirley crowns the edifice and points us to the Restoration.

But such glib docketing as this, apt enough for the orderly theatre of the French, is applied at our peril to the turbulent stage we are considering here. These men are much too strong to be imprisoned in categories, and if we ask them to oblige us by holding certain threads of continuity in their hands they will twine them into knots the moment our backs are turned. We may make a neat little list for our own convenience, but if we are wise we shall not show it to them.

Even gentle Shirley heralds a new comedy that certainly did not, when it came, lack vigour; if we thought of him only as marking the end of an old one we might as well pronounce Marlowe, who had a strain of medievalism in him, the final glory of the middle-ages. And how soft, really, was Fletcher—with *Valentinian* to his credit? There is no way of tabulating this fiery drama, save perhaps by a graph composed of rockets, catherine-wheels, roman-candles and golden rain.

One might indeed try to grade it according to the intensity and quality of the passion that possessed the writers. Such a grading would nicely fit the cases of Fletcher, Massinger and Shirley, and might favour the variously-esteemed Marston. It should do very well for tragedy; at least it could not fail to assign *Lear* its rightful place. But what of comedy? Is *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* a nobler or more intensely felt work than *The Great Duke of Florence*? Above all, would it resolve the question of what constitutes decadence, and would it establish when, in this drama, decadence began?

In any great movement in any art there is the rise, the culmination, and the decline; and in any later age we tend to select as the culmination whatever point in the curve best suits the spirit of that age. In nineteenth-century England our grandfathers held that all great painters in the past Rafael and Michel-Angelo embodied exactly their notions of beauty, godliness and technical perfection. In the doubting eighties we began slowly to dethrone them in favour of the Primitives, less skilled, we said, but more spiritual, bearing the stamp of an age of faith. When the Primitives had become a cult, and when the aesthetes who had particularly extolled them were no more, we found an excessive regard for them debilitating, and cast forward in search of stronger stimulants. After Rafael and Michel-Angelo there was nothing left for genius but to distort a little, and El Greco obliged us, with strange attenuations like shapes in a morphia dream; or there were the ecstatic posturings and hypertrophied eyeballs of Murillo and Ribera, lit strongly from the side in stage fashion. Later we discovered with delight that great art could be a little frivolous: clouds just as fine as those that had been rent asunder for the passage of Tintoretto's hurtling saints now served as perches for the carmine-flicked hussies of Tiepolo. One need not follow the decline of that proud draughtsman-ship to its end in *Allegory on Mr Tulkinghorn's ceiling*.

There is a rough analogy here. In some such fashion we have changed our minds from time to time about the Elizabethans—about all of them, that is, except the greatest.

By his contemporaries, even Shakespeare was not always rated at his true worth. Surprisingly to us, Webster put Chapman first, Jonson next, then Beaumont and Fletcher, then Shakespeare, Dekker and Heywood, whom he praised collectively for their "happy and copious industry". In the sixteens it was Beaumont and Fletcher who led, Jonson and Shakespeare running next. Dryden was soon to reverse the order; and for nearly three centuries our veering moods have favoured one or another of his fellows as candidate for the second place, but no one has seriously challenged the supremacy of Shakespeare. This being so, we can easily decide when the era reached its apogee, if we are content to choose those years in which the greatest poet was at his highest power. They are the years of the great tragedies. Whatever brilliance illumined the rise and the decline, the flame burned steadiest and brightest in the first decade of the seventeenth century.

Although Sir Walter Scott had already been struck by the power of Middleton, the cult of the lesser Elizabethans may be said to have begun with the publication of Charles Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* in 1808. Garrick had been an assiduous collector of old plays, others were in the British Museum, and certain authors were represented by complete editions of their works. From all of these Lamb assembled his extracts. He gave preference to tragic rather than comedic poetry, part of his design being "to illustrate what may be called the moral sense of our ancestors". Fletcher and Massinger, he proceeds, are "in the estimation of the world the only dramatic poets of that age who are entitled to be considered after Shakespeare"; his further purpose is to test that judgment by comparing them with their fellows and "to show what we have slighted, while beyond all proportion we have cried up one or two favourite names". He concludes his preface with the somewhat sweeping assertion that excepting Milton's *Samson Agonistes* no serious drama to speak of has appeared since the reign of Charles I.

Lamb's enthusiasm not only communicated itself to his contemporaries but coloured literary criticism for generations to come. Without his prompting, the stately Sir Adolphus Ward might have written less respectfully than he did of the men whom even Swinburne described as splendid slovens. Swinburne gave us, says William Archer, the Lamb doctrine through a megaphone, breaking out into fresh superlatives with every poet who came under his review. A long line of critics echoed him, until at last young Rupert Brooke scan-

dalised Cambridge tea-tables by contrasting the "clean fineness" of the Elizabethans with the filthy standards, as he considered them, of the Edwardian drawing-room.

All these critics were highly susceptible to beauty of language; not one of them, however much or little theatre-minded, was of theatre stuff. Lamb was a discerning judge of quality in actors, but his one attempt at a play was so hopeless that when it was hissed he himself joined in the hissing. Swinburne's *Duke of Gandia* is little more than a curiosity of stage literature. Addington Symonds, one of those inestimably valuable Englishmen who write of English things from abroad,¹ has Swinburne's enthusiasm without his extravagance; but he never wrote for the theatre. The untimely death of Brooke may have deprived us of a great playwright, but his *Lithuania*, a one-act thriller on the romantic German model, hardly warrants that belief. It is true that in the masterly study of Webster that won him his fellowship he insists that we shall look on a play as a play and not as literature; true also that in the *Specimens* Lamb conscientiously exhibited his dramatists for the most part in scenes, even in consecutive scenes. But the very word is significant. You can give "specimens" of a poet's work, possibly to his advantage if he is too prolific; but no true maker of plays is flattered by quotation; he had rather you printed—or, better still, acted—his best play as a whole work of art. A poet can soar to immortality on a single line; a dramatist is damned if there is one weak link in his chain, he must be poet and engineer in one. The men whose highest flights Lamb presented to a tamer but receptive age were all excellently quotable because they were, all undeniably, poets; but if you read them in full you may not concede them the same excellence as makers of plays.

In effect, whether we endorse them or no, these successive eulogies of the Elizabethan and his methods served to confirm through another century the belief that a "great" play must follow the Elizabethan model. From Sheridan Knowles and Bulwer Lytton, who wrote for Macready, to Wills and Stephen Phillips, who wrote respectively for Irving and Tree, this belief persisted, fading at last under the impact of a serious drama that followed the pattern and speech of everyday life. In this new drama there was no part for the romantic actor, and his indefinable charm of boot and saddle, cloak and sword, began to vanish from the stage. To supply the want—for it was a want—some of us turned to the ballet, some to the big musical show. Others called for a reversion to the

drama of an older time. If they could not agree with Elia that fine tragedy had died for ever in 1642, they were fairly certain that fine comedy had not survived the death of Queen Anne. Shakespeare was becoming a bore because we had too much of him; Goldsmith and Sheridan, also stale because the public never seemed to tire of them, were anaemic copyists of sturdier men. It was asserted that the Elizabethans, with their "almost faultless technique", offered the soundest foundation for a national dramatic revival. To William Archer,² a critic of forty years' standing who had witnessed and supported a dramatic revival that had culminated in the work of Pinero, Shaw, Galsworthy and Granville-Barker, this seemed intolerable nonsense. When, in 1919, the Phoenix Society came into being and announced its inaugural programme, Archer asked: Why revive old rubbish? The rubbish in question included *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Volpone*, and the Society's redoubtable president, Dr Montague Summers, administered a crushing rebuke. Next year, and again in 1921, Archer was invited to deliver at King's College a series of lectures on the drama. These appeared in book form as *The Old Drama and the New: an Essay in Re-valuation*. They were perhaps the most formidable challenge yet issued to the doctrine of Lamb, Swinburne and the rest, and every true believer should study them, if only to re-fortify his faith.

Archer's purpose was not so much to "debunk" the Elizabethans and their successors as to impress upon a young generation who had recently emerged from the first great war that the theatre of their time had in its own way as good and better stuff to offer. He proved his case with abundant help from the old masters, whom he quoted freely and devastatingly. He was able, quite legitimately, to shew that in the still empirical art of writing plays they were often mere fumblers, merging and muddling ill-sorted plots, wrenching characters wildly for the sake of a rough and ready tying-up of loose ends, abusing the devices of disguise, of the aside, of the overhead soliloquy in a manner unendurable to any audience that was not indifferent or chuckle-headed; in taste and morals their standards were those of lusty, perhaps, but vicious and grubby adolescents.

The first charge relates to their craftsmanship. It is easy to condemn it, but only with certain reservations. By no means all of it was bad; Fletcher, Massinger and Shirley are not alone in refuting that proposition. Jonson is a witness for both sides; *Volpone* is much better put together than *Every Man in His Humour*, and *The Alchemist* better than either. Nor must

one forget the extraordinary freedom as to place and time that their stage conferred—a freedom often abused, doubtless; nor that the aside, the soliloquy and the disguise were all accepted conventions which a dramatist was not only allowed but expected to observe. It was Archer's claim that a modern playwright who denies himself these conveniences is a finer practitioner because he works in a more exacting medium. That claim at least does not stand up to the test of analogy. In verse there are few forms more exacting than the villanelle—yet who would condemn a poet to spend his life writing villanelles? There is a peculiar satisfaction, as every play-goer knows, in the skill that unfailingly brings the right man into the right room by the right door at the right moment; yet we do not object when Hamlet drifts in from nowhere in particular at no particular moment to speak his great soliloquy. That is only one of the puzzles inherent in Archer's thesis, which is that as the drama progresses it will purge itself more and more of its lyrical element and more and more faithfully imitate life. In what atrophy that counsel of perfection might eventually land us we need not here enquire, because since the nineteen-twenties the drama has taken a turn that Archer could hardly have foreseen. In his day, and being of his day, he most honourably exhorted the rising generation not, as he put it, to jeer at living lions and worship dead dogs.

The Elizabethans were indeed splendid slovens; and of all their slovenries perhaps the worst was their habit of jamming two or more plays together to make an evening's entertainment. Encouraged by that dangerously accommodating stage, they believed that the attention of an audience was best held by incessant changes of focus, by the alternating efforts of two poets or more who had neither taste nor style in common. Sometimes the method worked: *Eastward Ho!* is an example; but there are few who would not bewail Middleton's entanglement with Rowley in *The Changeling*. The comedians must be well furnished with bawdry, perhaps with a song and dance to get them off somehow when the audience had had enough; the tragedy must above all astound. In reading some of these plays one is often in doubt whether any character will outlive any scene; turning a new page one glances down it for the familiar *Stabs him* (or *Drinks*), *Falls* and *Dies*. It is amazing that a critic as sensitive as Swinburne should turn for comparison to such masters of tragic concentration as the Greeks. This drama of confusion, needless to say, stemmed from our defiance of the Senecan rules; not even Shakespeare always exercised the self-restraint which is the price of liberty. By

submitting to the rules French tragedy pursued its classic course when it was well-nigh dead, and long after ours, in its abounding liveliness, had rattled itself to bits as romantic melodrama. Lively it certainly was; but if you are to plead, as is sometimes done, that the virtue of this kind of construction is to display the whole stuff of life within a single frame, you must choose your examples with care. Sometimes it is not the stuff of life, but of Elizabethan nightmares, begotten of a surfeit of farced pike, carbonadoes and marchpane, washed down with quarts of sack. To do him justice, the Elizabethan second-rater is not always unaware of his shortcomings. Some of his epilogues deliver themselves with a sheepish grin; with precious little care for his integrity as an artist, he will be content enough if he has got away with it once more.

The second charge is that of barbarism: that the plays reflect a brutal age. Repeating it to-day, we should pray to be delivered from an hypocrisy as bad as any the Victorians affected. When Archer made it our standards had been challenged by one war, not shaken by two. We did not then know how soon there was to be a recrudescence of every horror that has ever sprung from hatred, envy and uncharitableness. Hardly in his most depraved imaginings did the Elizabethan conceive worse outrages on human dignity than have been perpetrated by men and women who used the telephone, listened to the wireless, rode in trains and cars, and were outwardly very like ourselves. Human complacency has suffered a rude shock. We now know that the walls of our civilisation are of the thickness of a soap-film, and as fragile. Only is it a mark of grace in us that our consciences are not easy; we no longer accept abominable things as a necessary part of life.

We are hardly on firmer ground when we reproach the Elizabethans with the grossness of their humour; was it not Ben Jonson who first spoke of calling a spade a spade, and are we not all agreed now-a-days that that is a wholesome and hearty thing to do? According to Rupert Brooke, in the passage quoted, the Elizabethans *liked* obscenity, and the prim and wicked people who did not had better leave them alone. Before their mystical symbol of cuckoldry we can only bow the head in reverence—not quite in understanding; the Horns were as indispensable to them as the raspberry to the comedian of the music-hall. Not the least gift of the Renaissance to the Elizabethans was the convention, deriving from classic myth, that when a husband was betrayed his forehead instantly

prouted with antlers. They cannot have believed this as a fact; but it is clear that as matter for jest it never to palled, and that the slightest allusion to it threw them into most enviable paroxysms of merriment. But without undue self-righteousness we can be glad that our comedians do not now rely for easy laughs on physical pain and deformity, rotten teeth, foul breath and the diseases of harlots. It is a singular thing that, while there is not much mention of the Plague proper, the Pox is for the Elizabethans an unfailing source of fun.

So much for the prosecution. What for the defence? The defence take a different line altogether. They brush the charges aside, put their man in the box, and invite you to listen to his voice.

As with the remoter Mysteries, the approach is through the ear. We were in those days a music-loving and music-making people; the plays were introduced and interspersed with music, and we could hardly have endured the heavy monologues of Chapman if we had not been subject to the enchantment of musical speech. This drama was to us very largely what opera was to the Italians, and we shall understand it better if we think of it as something of that kind. Now opera is notoriously more irrational than drama in its choice of theme. To look no further back, *Don Giovanni* is "about" a gentleman who seduces ladies and goes to hell; it was licensed for performance in this country after a good deal of hesitation, and its amorality was something of a headache for opera-goers who could not understand how so wicked a story could be so gay. *Der Freischutz* is "about" magic bullets and other nonsensical Black Forest devilments. The *Ring* is "about" lust, incest, murder, fire and cataclysm quite in the Elizabethan vein. *Tosca* is "about" illicit passion, with torturings, behind the scenes but audible, a firing-squad doing its nasty business on the stage, and a lady who hurls herself from the ramparts of Saint Angelo. And all are acknowledged jewels in the crown of opera, because of the music in which their monstrous plots are clothed. But supposing the Elizabethans thought of their tragedies as music, and that their concern was not merely what should happen next and why but also whether the best way from *allegro* to *maiestoso* lay through *andante* or *scherzando*, and what were the appropriate modulations of key? When we gravely enquire whether this or that behaviour is the conduct of a rational being, it might seem to them as if we were questioning the mental processes of a lute, or the morals of a viol.

Ibsen and Pinero built their plays like ships, strong and just flexible enough to take all strains and stresses and be driven

through all weathers at the scheduled speed³. The Elizabethans put to sea in a ramshackle craft with banners, gilt, carronades and a glorious painted sail. Why should they worry? There was no long run, no sliding scale of royalties amounting to twelve-and-a-half per cent above a thousand gross; there were ten pounds down for the play and another pound or so as bonus if it went well. Why not let one's pen enjoy itself? Such conditions were as favourable to the inspiration of the moment as they were unfavourable to laborious craftsmanship, and we get both in the proportion we might expect. The result is, sometimes, very like opera. The question is not How can I credibly bring this or that to pass, but What situation can I pluck out of the common rag-bag of plots and sources by means of which I can give emotion a tongue and make it sing? Often the aria which emerges is trite or faulty; and then, all at once, comes the authentic top-note, the "Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young". This is not always a trickily devised unexpectedness, as Archer would have it, to cover bad work and win fame the laziest way; it is often a casual flowering, and so are many lovely things in that untidy garden.

Surely it was the poets' lines and the actors' voices that prevailed in a theatre, different from ours, where common sense need not be placated before emotion and melody could have free play. This was the age of Bacon; medievalism in thought was giving place to clear and ordered reasoning, whatever mists of superstition still hung in the air. The Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline audiences were not morons. Nothing but splendid verse splendidly spoken could have induced them to accept situations so inconceivable, impostures and credulities so fatuous, that we wonder that they were not guffawed and cat-called off the stage. Why, asks Archer, when Giovanna of Malfi is shewn the supposed bodies of her husband and child, does she not go near enough to them to discover that they are of wax? For the sake of some superb lines. Why, in *The Widow's Tears*, does Cynthia cohabit in a tomb with her own husband, believing him to be her lover? For the sake of some less superb lines. But then, if she could sing, our hard-headed fathers wept when an obese Traviata lay dying of consumption. If he can sing, we do not laugh when Siegfried removes the shield from an exuberant Brunnhilde and exclaims, after deep cogitation, *Das ist kein Mann!* Early in this century there was a melodrama in which a Bushranger—all the way from Australia in his red shirt and cartridge-belt—lay dead across on English tea-table, between his sometimes mistress, who had knifed him, and her husband, who was blind. She

passed her spouse his tea and cake over the body, explaining that there were flowers in the way. This was played by unsophisticated drama folk who knew their business and had good voices; and nobody laughed.

In the so-called palmy days to come the theatre was to be kept alive by actors' magic. From Betterton onward we can form some notion of their quality and style; but between Betterton and the Men of King James and King Charles there lie eighteen years of a theatreless England. We have to guess what these robust shadows were like in the flesh, in action. For versatility they must well have earned Polonius's encomium on the best actors in the world; but we can leave out Shakespeare, who solves most of an actor's problems for him. How did they follow Ben Jonson from the verborities of *Every Man in his Humour* through the rhetoric of *Sejanus* and the cankered lyricism of *Volpone* to the actuality of *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair*? Or Beaumont and Fletcher from burlesque and pastoral to tragedy, epic and tragi-comedy? Or Ford and Webster and Tourneur through a labyrinth of incredibilities down to an abyss of horror half real and half bogus—for them to make all real? What did they do with the turgid harangues of Chapman's Byron? How did they carry through that medley of cloak-and-sword and vaudeville, *The Spanish Gypsy*? How, with all the armament at their disposal, had they restraint enough for the card-playing scene in *A Woman Killed With Kindness*?

Of course they had the Dionysian afflatus; without that holy madness no one should set foot upon the boards. Next, perhaps, a quickness of mind first acquired when padding the hoof as near-outlaws, further quickened, in a later time, by some touch of Italian Comedy, and now sensing to a hairs-breadth what an audience would "stand for" and what it wouldn't. It would be a natural inheritance from the days when every company had its acrobats and tumblers if they were physically strong, graceful and adroit, their eyes and hands good servants; and coupled with this there must have been, at need, an almost frightening magnificence of bearing. The lines they spoke leave us in no doubt that there was a corresponding suppleness of tongue. Vowels were broad, and consonants were made to do their work; "girl" and "snarl" are disyllabic in Ford—who admittedly may have brought to London a west-country burr. But two things counted above all: a voice that could inflame the blood or freeze it, or command like the beat of a gong, or woo, or draw tears, or set the heart at rest, or follow in indeterminate half-tones the grey weaving

of Hamlet's mind, or sound a full-close in C major for Tamburlaine, or flick a double meaning at anyone sharp enough to catch it, starting the laugh behind the laugh that every comedian loves to hear; and the all-compelling imagination in virtue or which an actor declares and confirms that, whatever violence may be done to common sense, good taste or morality, the thing he is now presenting before your eyes is real, fitting, aesthetically right and spiritually true. The conclusion is that these wild plays owed a good deal to distinguished spellbinders.

But they were not all, in fact, so wild. Because, in some of them that we treasure most, beauty and savagery go hand in hand, we are in danger of forgetting what a strong vein of charity and commonsense runs through the work of Dekker, Heywood, Middleton, Beaumont, Fletcher and Massinger, to name only a few. These qualities are not the less there because at times the hard-up man of genius writes acridly, and seems intent on shewing us their very obverse. And although he may be, for present taste, too much at home in the stews, if the image of the sexual act seems to be forever before his eyes, he shews himself quite as well aware as we are of the sanctity of the marriage-vow and the aura that invests virginity. *Arden of Feversham* is strictly moral; so is *A Woman Killed With Kindness*. If Dekker's Bellafront in *The Honest Whore* is in part a stock figure, the real half of her is drawn with compassion as well as truth. That scene of rape in *The Spanish Gypsy* has a touch of Calderon; it must have made seducers of young women very uncomfortable. There is some perception of true honour as against code-honour and stage-honour in *A Fair Quarrel*. *Sejanus* is civilised and noble-hearted, and has something to say to tyrannies of our own age. *The Faithful Shepherdess* is but one instance of Fletcher's feeling for purity and fragrance, when so disposed; *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* is satire as wholesome as Jonson's but nearer in its kindliness to Shakespeare's, who never made the mistake of quarreling with his people.

For all that, it is in its wildness that the strength of this drama lies. Even the nicest Elizabethans were not consistently nice. Shakespeare himself might not have taken it very kindly had he learnt that one day we were to thrust him on our young because *As You Like It* was so sweet and *Henry V* so eloquent of our rough island story. If in reply he murmured something about the warped patriotism of Cassius, the derisory heroics in *Troilus*, the godly, itching Angelo, the rank sweetness of Antony's triple-turned whore, it would not do at all to smile

and make allowances, remembering that horrid dark lady who had played havoc with his quest of the lovely and the good. For, somewhere about the very early sixteen-hundreds, a Dark Lady indeed took charge, not only of Shakespeare but of the whole theatre of those years, and her name was not Mary Fitton but Melpomene: the tragic muse in person, pointing her rule-defying servants upward through the empyrean that they knew to a black limbo where only the human soul shone clear, under the merciless stars.

The muse does not descend unless she is invoked. What impelled them to invoke her; to forsake, for that perilous voyage, the *Ardens* and *Illyrias* where gentlemen and gentlewomen played with a love that was none the less true, the shadowy battleground of the *Histories*, the comfortable rule of law within the comfortable Ptolemaic universe—risking the discovery that the eternal harmony was a delusion; to seek out the mystery of evil; to unravel the undreamt-of, and terrifying, complexities of the heart? It was not so much that the time was out of joint, still less that they were growing tired; rather that they were beginning to grow up. Once, they had gone singing down the road with Tamburlaine in the morning sun. Now, the skies were overcast and the way was not so clear. The tapping of Hans Holbein's grisly Drummer, never wholly inaudible, caught up with them again; sometimes they even found themselves marching to his beat. But a greying world was not to be dismissed with a shrug and a sigh, for the exuberance of their youth was still potent in them. Pessimism must not enervate, but inspire; was there not something thrilling in the thought that Renaissance man, for all his god-like apprehension, was no more than a quintessence of dust? Drabness and wickedness must be passionately courted, even enjoyed. Human cruelty must be plumbed to its depths if you were to find the breaking-point of human fortitude. If you could not laugh happily, you could scourge and rail. Jonson may be harsh, Tourneur may be bloody, Marston may be foul; we cannot say of one of them that he is not *strong*. Only when the delectable Fletcher turns his back on life and death, enticing us toward the roseate evasions of tragi-comedy, can we say that degeneration has set in.

Chapter 31

Primus inter Pares

TO THE END of time the Elizabethans will continue to bend their fiery gaze on us, challenging us to say what we think of them. If some machine-maddened generation were ever to ban them as libertarians whose example was unsettling to the machine-mind, the next, in revolt, would rediscover them. Actors, at all events, cannot do without them. The theatre has shaken off its nineteenth-century fetters and is asserting its right to play anything anyhow. The one thing that a correspondingly enfranchised drama has so far failed to offer it is an opportunity for superhuman speech, even for the lung-filling, soul-expanding rant that died with Barry Sullivan and Edwin Booth.¹ This actors need, if they are not to lose their divinity and shrink to the stature of ordinary people. On the stage you must be strong before you can be gentle; only with a well-exercised diaphragm can you make yourself quietly heard. To true actors the microphone is a dishonest and cowardly subterfuge.

As early training it was once customary to recommend melodrama, because it required one to utter the most commonplace sentiments with clarity, resonance and conviction. Melodrama no longer serves, but there are still the Elizabethans, of whom we are becoming steadily more aware. Every decade, of course, must have its great Hamlet, if only to prove that we are not going downhill. But recently a distinguished actor has staked his claim to Volpone, just as Berterton did to Bosola, Garrick to Abel Drugger and Kean to Sir Giles Overreach. Will the pursuit of little-known great parts go on, until at last we discover what Field made of Bussy? Will *The Alchemist* be as often in the bill as *Twelfth Night*? And if so, shall we one day find ourselves in Webster's uncertainty about his contemporaries, not perfectly sure which of those giants is the head-and-shoulders colossus?—whether Shakespeare is something more than *primus inter pares*, the grandest tiger in that particular jungle? How far is it the truth that he stands free of questioning that others must abide, being not for an age but for all time? It is an enquiry to be made when we are young and answered when we are old.

In one respect at least this book must seem to lack proportion. In its attempt to portray a whole age, it has treated that age's greatest figure rather cursorily. If, it might well be asked, Massinger is worth ten pages, is not Shakespeare worth a hundred? The answer, admittedly, is yes. On the other hand, for ten readers who know their Jonson or their Beaumont and Fletcher, there are a thousand who know, pretty well, their Shakespeare. Readers who do not are unlikely to be reading these lines; readers who do may be glad to learn something about *Antonio's Revenge*, but assuredly will not need to be told the story of *Hamlet*, or to have re-dressed for them (since there is really very little left to say about *Hamlet*) a selection from the judgments that have been passed upon that achievement. Everyone knows *Julius Caesar*; few know *Valentinian* and *The Roman Actor*, and so on. None the less, this history has endeavoured to keep Shakespeare always near at hand, to observe, as it were, the planets with continual reference to the sun. There is something to be said for this method; the proportion that is apparently lost may not be lost after all.

The world has no doubts as to Shakespeare's supremacy, but acclaims him as an international heritage; and this universal acclamation, over-riding the bitterest animosity of race, is some proof that the world is fundamentally sane. We ourselves must at least acknowledge him as the most English thing we ever brought into being. He is the embodiment of our age-old notions of kindness and decency in human relations, enriched by a conception of ample living and free enquiry that came in the train of the Renaissance. His plays are in lineal descent from an early drama too adventurous for the Church to control and progressively secular in its trend; if ever the pageant-cart should come to rest in the inn-yard and if there, in some ferment of the spirit, great drama should be born, some such great drama as this it must be: in form as different from the classic as an English hedgerow from the trim vistas of Versailles.

Shakespeare could not for the life of him have written as Racine did, he was too much fascinated by the individual man. He did not select, he was all-embracing; and in that embrace he achieved a strange unity that completely baffled the early French critics. Deploring his formlessness and violence, they sensed in him only a beery good-fellowship, strongly characteristic of the hard-drinking English. If they had known of his suit against Mr Rogers for one-pound-fifteen-and-ten—and this in the very year of his greatest tragedy—they would have made the obvious comment. In a way they would have

been right. He *was* the national poet of a shopkeeping race; in a theatre that enjoyed no subsidy he may even be said to have kept shop himself.

For Granville-Barker the shop he helped to keep, after it had kept him, was a workshop. The Genius of the Workshop² is an illuminating phrase, disposing most satisfactorily of the familiar effigy who awaits his muse with his quill in one hand and the fore-finger of the other pressed against his brow: it reminds us that plays must be built before they are written. Henceforward everyone will want to use it. Still, we must not go on using it to the point at which the workshop takes precedence of the genius. Shakespeare was the average man at god-like pitch; the phrase must not be allowed to suggest the kind of averageness we can all understand, so quick on the job that in a twinkling the bright boy proceeds from oiling and greasing and the mending of inner-tubes to the head of the board-room table. If it leads at last to the happy back-slapping of a democratised William (he loathed the smell of a crowd) as just one of us who made good, the illuminating phrase will have to go. Shakespeare learned much from the workshop undoubtedly—but what did he bring to it? It was something of a gamble to join it at all. He was the daring-thrifty servant in the parable who made his talents breed. Anne, it may be, urged him to hoard them. One would give anything to have heard that fireside debate at Shottery, before the great decision was made. Perhaps there was none; perhaps he simply went, leaving behind him promises of money to come, nothing more substantial than his own bet on himself. The bet came off, and within twelve years he was negotiating for New Place. There were few of the workshop who did a quarter as well as this, and some, for all their craft, died poor. What did Shakespeare bring to it, more than they did?

As to character, the question may be answered in a word. He had poise. It is not recorded that he was an exceptionally placid baby, but he certainly acquired a level head. Whatever storms of heart he was to encounter, he had innate stability enough to ride them. He became indeed a lute amenable to every wind, but he did not drift with every passion to attain that consummation. In religion his bent is apparently toward a Protestantism too broad to offend an agnostic; it is a cool church that he seems to have in mind, with a radiant world around it.³ In politics—had his circumstances or his sanity permitted such an adventure in such days—he would undoubtedly have been what is called a trimmer: one of those

unprincipled persons who shift their weight when the boat is threatening to capsize.

As to his intellectual capacity, we are torn between the testimony of Matthew Arnold, in whose view it out-topped knowledge, and that of Bernard Shaw, who pronounced it entirely despicable when compared with his own.⁴ When he delivered himself of this judgment Shaw was constructively engaged in the promotion of a Fabian paradise, and destructively in assailing the theatre for which Irving stood. Behind the jibe there may have lurked an intuition that Shakespeare would have forgiven Irving a great deal for the sake of his company, and would not have felt at all at home in the tidy world of Mr and Mrs Sidney Webb. All the reformer in Shaw resented the fact that Shakespeare had no plan for setting mankind to rights, all the partisan in him that he never took sides, all the Puritan in him that he seemed to preach no gospel. But Shaw was a playwright too, and had a musician's ear for verse; and when Augustin Daly ruined that pretty barcarolle in the first scene of the *Dream* by cutting the lines that seemed to him superfluous, he was taken to task by a young critic who made no secret of where his affections lay.⁵

The mind that Shakespeare brought to the workshop was receptive, acquisitive, derivative, reflective; that it was to take a profoundly philosophic turn as his voyage of discovery proceeded nobody can deny. But it was the mind of a poet, not of a philosopher; no system of thought was to spring from it; the schools have no such word as Shakespeareanism. He lays down no law. His ideas are the ideas of his time, his history is from Hollinshed and Plutarch; in classics and geography he fails to win Jonson's approval. There is no confirmation that he made the grand tour with Southampton; his Italy is the Italy of Renaissance Englishmen, travellers and stay-at-homes alike; even his remarkably authentic seamanship might have been picked up at Wapping.⁶ Only his legal language supports the belief that he was for a short time in a scrivener's office—but Faustus' assignment of his soul is as valid as any law in Shakespeare. His respect for the social order is as conventional as deep-rooted, although he does not adulate his sovereign beyond reason, and loves to see overbearing authority tripped up, or too-earnest planning come to grief. Biron's derisive laughter is his, and so is Falstaff's chuckle, and both are still faintly to be heard at every fresh attempt to make us good by legislation. His mind, in short, had not the kind of originality that becomes subversive; he might mock, but he did not rail. He was a congenial and safe recruit for

actors who relied on the protection of the peerage and the crown itself in their unending battle with the magistracy.

Finally, there was his equipment for what we briskly call the job. Agencies innumerable had equipped him for the job. Some generations of poet-stuff may have lain dormant in the Arden or Shakespeare stock before the Renaissance kindled it and the hour brought forth the man. Environment also had been at work. Without trespassing on the domain of Birthday oratory, one may surmise that in the thick air of the Avon valley there was something sedative, favourable to an unforced ripening. He had "small Latin", but in Stratford's grammar school it may have occurred to him on some drowsy afternoon that the lilt of the sensuous Ovid might make better music in English ears if transmuted into English rhyme. We can amuse ourselves by imagining what the child heard on Sunday morning, scrubbed and spruce and dangling his heels in Holy Trinity Church, while a melodious bumble-bee, trapped in a sunny window, buzzed in harmony with the melodious sermon. The nightingales, it is said, have quitted Stratford, possibly in the mood of that authentic minstrel who stood by for the *Pleasures* of Kenilworth and found he was obsolete and not required; but Shakespeare heard them, and saw the kingfishers darting from their nests beside the stream. A hundred country sights and sounds furnished the imagery he was to use, and peopled a rustic fairy land, prompting him to those native wood-notes that Milton rated second only to the chiselled lines of Jonson. Shakespeare's little people know nothing of Cambridge quadrangles or the Inns of Court:

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves,
And ye, that on the sands with printless foot
Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him
When he comes back: you demi-puppets that
By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make
Whereof the ewe not bites: and you whose pastime
Is to make midnight mushrooms, that rejoice
To hear the solemn curfew. . . .

Contrast them with their exquisite counterpart in Milton:

The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move;
And on the tawny sands and shelves
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.
By dimpled brook and fountain-brim

The wood-nymphs, decked with daisies trim,
Their merry wakes and pastimes keep:
What hath night to do with sleep?

For music there is little to choose between these lines, and the fevered, mounting throb of the last is not to be resisted. But how well Shakespeare knows the habits and idiosyncracies of his elves, and how he assigns them their proper, serious duties; how purposefully they seem to set about the tracing of their fairy rings and the growing of their mushrooms. Moreover Prospero invokes them at a tremendous moment, when he is about to break his staff and down his books. Comus cites his in support of a well-argued claim that he and his rout have all the precedent they need for making a night of it; and the elves are of a kind appropriate to the occasion. Pert and dapper are urban attributes, one might almost say night-club attributes; a dapper elf is too neatly shod to chase the ebbing Neptune with a printless foot, and would cease to be dapper long before Neptune had done with him. These delectable creatures of Milton are creatures of the masque, furnished forth from the masque wardrobe and returning the clothes in spotless condition. They don't mind appearing at Ludlow, but would be happier still in St. James's Park. They go to bed at just about the time when you must be stealing out into the Warwickshire dawn, if you want to catch Shakespeare's rogues at the completion of their work. As for Puck, he was past Milton's handling; heaven alone knows what would have happened to *Comus* if Milton had given Puck a chance.

The purpose of this comparison is not to set—almost as it might seem to young Milton's advantage—the fire and grace of his enchanters' invocation against the temperate farewell with which old Shakespeare, his rough magic finally abjured, entrusts his Prospero. For there is more in those lines than meets the eye: the ear will detect the wash of the sea in that "fly him" and "comes back": a subtler charm surely than the patter of Dionysian ballet-shoes. It suggests only that Shakespeare is a great stickler for reality. At his most fanciful he is loth to admit to the inmost circle of his magic anything or anybody that does not ring true. Before they can qualify for the world of make-believe they have to be real.

A poet's quest of truth pursues uncharted ways. It became a regular trick of the Elizabethans to cap the most poignant situation with a prosaic touch that imparted an instant of credibility to a scene that might not be perfectly credible

without it. Often it deserved a better name; it was by more than a trick that the soul discarded its wrapping of noble words and spoke a few plain ones. Think of De Flores' abject "Not that I do not want it, for I do, piteously" at the moment of his ascendancy, or of Evadne's "What did he make this match for, dull Amintor?" In Shakespeare we encounter it again and again. Antony in defeat roars for another gaudy night; the fiery Hotspur bickers with his lady and comes to a council of war without his map. We need not recall a whole sequence of such small masterstrokes in *Lear*; but there is Juliet's "O, shut the door". In the comedies there are brief apocalyptic flashes surpassing even Dogberry's discovery of the ass he is. By what inspiration are we told, at the moment when poor Sir Nathaniel has forgotten his lines, that he is a very good bowler? Why, only when he is passing from the play, is it revealed to Sir Toby that Sir Andrew is a *thin-faced* knave? The magic-mundane touch extends even to inanimate things. A square foot of cambric tips the scales in *Othello*; no stage thunder is as momentous as Cornwall's stocks. The jordan at the Boar's Head is barely spoken of, yet so real is it that once it was matter for grave discussion (under the heading of other business) at a Stratford governors' meeting.

The touch of the commonplace at the high moment comes easily to Shakespeare, because of all his keys to the human heart the master-key is his perception of the divinity in homely things. Marlowe could not have used it in *Tamburlaine*. That hero's descant on his dead Zenocrate is one of the loveliest in our language; but compare it with the two half-lines of Leontes when he recalls the gaze of the wife he has lost:

Stars, stars,
And all eyes else dead coals.

If Chapman had taken risks with it in *Bussy* he would have brought his grandiose structure down in laughter. A playwright must be very sure of himself before he can employ a comic porter to bridge the chasm between midnight horror and morning clarity. That is to say, he must be sure of his balance.

If Shakespeare had not possessed balance in the highest degree he could never have made *Lear's* journey; his play and his own reason would have toppled into the abyss together. He could not have held in poise the eternal forces we

to-day call fascism and democracy, vouchsafing not a jot more praise or blame to either and bidding us note only the ruin of one man who cannot govern himself. Nor could he have won our tears for Shylock as well as our hisses, ending the tale happily at Belmont under the harmoniously-moving heavens. "Such harmony is in immortal souls", and the balance, or harmony, we are discussing is the artist's echo of it here on earth.

But this obligation of balance pursues the playwright from first to last. His echoing of a divine harmony is an acknowledgement of divine law and its opposite, which means that he must strike a balance between lawful and lawless, good and evil. He must do this, in a sense, even in the most amoral comedy, inventing for his purpose a code whereby his gallants are right and his cuckolds wrong; when Shirley falters is when he fails to stick to his code and ends with a perfunctory concession to propriety. Next, it is obvious that his play will not please if its shape lacks symmetry—which is a form of balance too. We may note in passing the shapeliness even of a hasty commission work like *The Merry Wives*, or how carefully *Hamlet* is built up from the elements of a forgotten thriller—of which indeed the play bears traces still: a noble pile, not a Parthenon. And with that balance of shape there must be balance of character. When Shakespeare made *Rosalynde* into a play, he found it necessary to balance Lodge's cheerful forest-dwellers with a melancholy Jaques, who needed a Touchstone further to balance *him*; accordingly he created both. But long before *As You Like It* he had mastered a rule of his craft that he never abandoned, although he was to amplify it in practice as time went on with a subtlety that made it seem no rule at all. In his earliest comedy (as we believe it was) he gives us Valentine and Proteus, Julia and Silvia, Launce and Speed; the heavy Launce serves the mercurial Proteus, the mercurial Speed the constant Valentine. In his next, Navarre and his three gentlemen and the Princess of France and her three ladies furnish an instance almost too elementary for comment; but with whom could the timid Sir Nathaniel better pass the time of day than with the formidable Holofernes, and who could better set off the sententious Armado than his ruthlessly pragmatical little page? Depend upon it, Shakespeare knew from the start what kind of friction set the sparks of character flying. The tender and foolish Helena, the tender and minxish Hermia; they and their loves balanced by royal love; the whole balanced by the clowns who in their turn are balanced by the fairies, among

whom the first to appear is a prim little girl who is properly awed and intrigued by such a rude little boy as Puck: as that balanced and balancing mind surveyed the world, everyone in it found his dramatically effective place: the steady Falconbridge and the wavering John, the rock-like Horatio and his storm-tossed Prince—one could go on and on, through the balancing of Bertram and Parolles, of Antony and Octavius with Enobarbus magnificently poised between the two, to the ultimate opposition of Ariel and Caliban, on which a secular drama can hardly improve. Perhaps the most perfect of his character-patterns is in *Twelfth Night*: a young Duke who is in love with love and a very young Countess who is in love with grief; they awake when they are brought face to face with a venturesome girl who is recklessly in love with life. That pattern is not always made perfectly clear; it certainly was not in the days when Olivia was played by Viola's mother. But was there ever such balance as this, within the intricate balance of the whole comedy?

But we have not done with balance yet, although at this point Jonson and others, exemplary balancers so far (for nearly all of them learned the rudiments) begin to fail us. Shakespeare seldom if ever shirks the final issue. For the individual character also is a balanced thing. It exists in a state of balance; it is in danger, and also becomes interesting dramatically, when this balance is disturbed, and is destroyed when it is overthrown. Like the atom it is compact of energy and restraint. Tragedy portrays the splitting of the human atom, and the explosion that follows on the removal of man's self-control; it shews us the self-destruction—it is always *self*-destruction, whoever strikes the final blow—of a Coriolanus, a Lear, an Othello. Well managed, the spectacle sends us home with our hearts washed clean; this process was known to the Greeks as purgation by pity and horror. Comedy on the other hand effects purgation by laughter. Rather like the Chinese with their gunpowder (until a progressive European enlightened them) it employs the same combustible material to make people jump—that is to say for fun. Ford goes through the mental process of Othello and Leontes, but in little; he does not make a wreck of his world but of Mrs Ford's buckbasket, and when his sanity returns he apologises like a man. But in tragedy and comedy alike the dramatist's business is essentially the same: to acknowledge a balance, to disturb it to the point of an explosion of horror or absurdity as the case may be, and to restore it, with the rhythms

of everyday life re-established and the clock ticking comfortably on.⁷

This awareness of an essential balance in the scheme of things, in the shaping of a play, in the inter-relation of its people and in the heart of each one of them, sorts well with the hypothesis that in his own character Shakespeare was blessed with poise. With it sorts also the fact that he stuck to the workshop for twenty years, behaving himself, earning his share, pleasing current taste without losing his integrity, and so ordering his private business that he retired with more than a competence. He had himself to thank for his stability, the workshop for his security. Like many of the less fortunate free-lancers he had an observant and wide-ranging mind and a fluent pen; but it was in the workshop that he learned how to use them.

It was the making of Shakespeare—of as much of him, let us say, as could be made—that from first almost to last he was working with actors in a theatre. At a very early stage he mastered the dramatist's first lesson: that it is his function to provide material for acting. In consequence we find him progressively discarding the irrelevances which are the besetting sin of the "literary" playwright: the Lylyesque conceits and euphuisms; the self-invocations with which at times Tamburlaine and Barabas revert from flesh and blood to gaudy figureheads like Herod, their remote ancestor: the hortatory rhetoric of Chapman. He suffered from a youthful inability to keep his brains quiet, said the young Bernard Shaw, who was a little troubled that way himself. But it was not long before the theatre taught him restraint; not how Biron's great tirade is not only held within the frame of drama but, as it mounts from fanasy to fantasy, becomes the turning point of the play, and how even the Queen Mab speech is slipped in at the one possible and perfect moment, while the torches are waiting in the dusk, and tells us something of Mercutio that we need to know. Richard at Barkloughly is lyricism incarnate, but wearing the yoke of drama. There are a hundred slight instances—indeed, the slighter the more revealing—of how he learned to compel lovely words to speed the play. The *Dream* offers many; here is one, just after the passage that Daly mutilated. Lysander discloses the great project:

Helen, to you our minds we will unfold:
To-morrow night, when Phoebe doth behold
Her silver visage in the watery glass,
Decking with liquid pearl the bladed grass—

A time that lovers' flights doth still conceal—
Through Athens' gates have we devised to steal.

and Hermia, bubbling with excitement,

And in the wood, where often you and I
Upon faint primrose-beds wont to lie,
Emptying our bosoms of their counsel sweet,
There my Lysander and myself shall meet. . . .

Anyone who has produced the play remembers how these easy-flowing lines cast their benison even on a dress-rehearsal; so easy-flowing are they that we wonder how the pen kept up with them as they poured out. But note also how they awake dramatic expectancy, luring it upward from line to line and at last leaving the plot a whole step advanced, and how deftly they sow the seed of the irony to come, when two angry young ladies will empty their bosoms to quite another purpose; all done in ten entrancing lines. Match it if you can, in other men. It is a far cry from Athens to Inverness and the hair-raising call to thick night that springs from the reading of the Letter, with the insistent thud of those "Comes" and the prophetic overtones of kites and crows in "my keen knife". Or to Forres (Forres! even the names in *Macbeth* are full of boding):

Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to the rocky wood;

a miraculous assembly of vowels and consonants, as many have pointed out. Yes indeed, but those evil-drowsy words are also telling us that Banquo will soon be coming back across the park. More, they are-telling Lady Macbeth that she is no longer in her husband's counsels: she can occupy herself with her dreams.

All these things are in the lines, as actors know, and it was because Shakespeare wrote with actors' voices perpetually in his ears that he could confidently put them there. The actors were his instruments—and they with some justice may have held that he was theirs. An actor always wants to feel what he calls happy in his part; he is not content to speak his lines, he must *be*. He must be, that is to say, his *selected* self, for the player who is full master of his art has all humanity in him and only need obliterate whatever is inapplicable to the part he is playing. He requires, then, that his lines shall sound true.

But a true line asks for true acting, and true acting for more and more true lines, until the lines become true character, playing itself out through true situations to a true end. It is likely that between the Lord Chamberlain's men and their young poet there was a continual process of mutual fertilisation.

Nor was this all. A poet who wrote to suit the players need never worry how to cast a part. We might be astonished if we learned how often Shakespeare adopted the supposedly detestable practice of writing the part to fit the man. It certainly makes for sterility in a sterile time, but this was a teeming time, of great poets and great players. In our praise of him we often say that his people are 'drawn in the round'. Why should they not be, if they were there before his eyes, growing in rehearsal, and the play growing with them? We can imagine a script of Jonson coming down from on high like the tables of stone, not necessarily so a script of Shakespeare. We know what he thought of gagging, but there are some obvious gags in the Folio; authorised gags, doubtless, because they held the part to come alive. He conceived his Hamlet, but he knew his Burbage too; he found his Dogberry in a Buckinghamshire village, but he knew his Kemp. Had he not his own comrades in mind when he projected his version of the Irregulars into the Histories? The very fact that his parts are so easy to fit prompts the guess that each of them once fitted one man like a glove. If their many-sidedness gives them life, may that not be because they were built round living men?

At all events it is instructive to take a few human types at random, and compare what Shakespeare makes of each of them with what any of his contemporaries make of any of them. Of the man of action: how many human facets are we shewn in Tamburlaine, and how many in Henry V? Of the "too absolute" man: how many in a Guise, a Bussy d'Ambois, and how many in Caius Marcius? Of the melancholic, action-postponing man: how many in Clermont d'Ambois and how many in Hamlet? Of the noble conspirator: where do we find the exaltation of Brutus and of Cassius—noble even when he is mean?—not in *Catiline* or *Sejanus*. Of the unrepentant philosophic cozeners: are we to set Volpone against Falstaff? Of the weakling: if in the horror and pathos of its ending *Edward II* runs *Richard II* close or surpasses it, what is the whole Edward compared with the whole Richard? Of the Jew—the well-worn comparison: why does Barabas decline from his first splendour until his silly cauldron affords him no

statelier end than he deserves, while Shylock stalks (or totters—it is some measure of the part that he can do either) out of the trial scene an integrated human complexity, whom his self-effacing creator leaves to the actor to resolve? As for his heroic happy women, his Rosalinds, Violas and Beatrices, it would be hard to match them at all on any comparable scale; Shakespeare did quite as much for the New Woman as Ibsen or Shaw. But if to-day we encountered Juliet and Cleopatra for the first time, would we rank them no higher than the Duchess and Vittoria? At once it would be off with the old loves and on with the new. So much for *primus inter pares*.

The illuminating phrase has served its turn. The workshop taught him its rules and limitations and afforded him its opportunities. Now we have to do with something no workshop can teach, and there is little to say of it that has not been better said already. Still, it is always profitable to resuscitate a platitude as a living truth, and most of all in a time of shifting values.

Let us pretend that he never wrote a line of verse, putting aside Shakespeare the poet, except in the word's first meaning which is "maker"; we can still keep to this matter of character, and see what added touch his genius brings to the making of men and women. Now the test of genius in the arts is its ability to irradiate familiar things with beauty, to transmute even dross into gold. That is the only alchemy within man's power; his strenuous doings with the atom are nothing to it, poor titan-stuff, lacking divinity. But the magic, say, which transforms a queer, crabbed old lady into Mr F's Aunt, that is worth having, as the world eventually acknowledges in terms of first editions and Birthday luncheons. We call Dickens a genius because he had that magic, and so had Shakespeare. In him also we can look for a small but perfect instance, without scaling the dizzier altitudes. Let us take the case of Ancient Pistol.

We must play fair, claiming nothing on his behalf that is not implicit in the lines. Pistol, before the magic got to work upon him, was familiar garbage from the war in the Low Countries—if he was ever there; one pip below Captain Bobadil in rank, but of related stock. According to classic models he was adequately covered for the stage by the *Miles Gloriosus*, the braggart and bully who is caught out and exposed. That, or a variant, was good enough for Ben Jonson. But for Shakespeare it was not the way to the true Pistolness of Pistol. He must be, not a mask, but an epitome of fallible

man. Let him be caught out in the end by all means—but he must also be catching himself out all the time, knowing it, feeling it, and rising above it only to crash again at once. The ridiculous exists, dramatically speaking, in strict relation to the sublime; it is a rule that every great clown takes to heart. Pistol's perception of his innate sublimity is as keen as that of any imaginative almost-gentleman who has quite gone wrong. Everything goes wrong with Pistol, there is not a whole thing about him; he knows perfectly well that if he dared pluck at his wretched glove to hurl it in the faces of his traducers it would be the fingers that sordidly came away, shaming him. But in his own eyes he is Marlowe's noble Scythian, temporarily under a cloud through no fault of his own; august phrases tread a muzzy galliard in the ruins of his brain, emerging every now and then in haughty invective against those who misprize him. They pound an accompaniment to his epic ride into Gloucestershire with tidings of the new King, so that at first all he can splutter out to his chief is of Africa and golden joys. There is a benignly mocked majesty in Pistol; his is the tragi-comedy of all might-have-beens and never-will-bes; his head is dishonourably bloody, but you cannot say it is bowed so long as the elves flit round it and caper about his deplorable boots, ready to trip him again. His final shewing-up means nothing to him, nor is it the end; his Nell is dead in the spital of malady of France and there is no one left to love him—and now the elves withdraw, so that in ten lines he may see himself. But they are after him again as he slouches off under a darkening sky toward further and more infamous horizons. Such is the alchemy of Shakespeare, brought to bear on just one of the Irregulars whom he took over from the *Famous Victories*. There is more in it than a felicitous surrealism, far more than Jonson's flair for embodied humours; there is a triumphant evocation of the soul of goodness in things evil, a creator's kindly delight even in the most preposterous of created things.

But it is not only with Shakespeare's fantastics that the elves are busy, or the Angel of the Odd, or the Comic Spirit, or what you will. They hop in the walks of his high-comedy personages, and gambol in their ways, tirelessly luring them toward self-discovery. It is remarkable how many of his pleasant people, from the young gentlemen of the court of Navarre to Benedick and Beatrice, are not only discovered in the course of the play, but discover themselves. In other words they not only live but grow. This is true even of his most god-like creatures, save perhaps of Falstaff. For Falstaff, being

the Comic Spirit in person, cannot learn anything, he has too much to teach; and when harsh events begin to teach him he is finished; there is nothing left of him for *Henry V* but his deathbed, at second-hand. In the great figures of the tragedies there is self-discovery of a more formidable kind. Even Iago, going nonchalantly to the rack with an artist's sense of fulfilment, would hardly recognise himself as the malcontent subaltern of a few acts before. Richard of Gloucester and Macbeth, less devils than titanic men, see themselves at last as they are, and to die with harness on their backs in the yellow glare of battle is for them release, a kind of redemption. Brutus and Cassius, clasping hands for the last time, are suffused with a clear light not of this world. What light, then, shines on the dying Antony? or on Cleopatra enthroned, with every irony of royal whoredom in attendance, in a death that defies and embarrasses not only Caesar but all who would coerce our great Irregulars into more governed ways: what more is there for those two to learn, now? Poor foolish Lear dies infinitely wise, having plumbed the world's wickedness while he was mad. If it were not for the play's pervading compassion you might say that here was art turned hubristic and challenging Creation itself. Shakespeare discards the happy ending of the old play; when Lear has made all his discoveries the only thing to say is "Break, heart, I prithee, break"; and break it does. The mystery of evil faced and explored—and why search for external causes of this ultimate flowering of the spirit?—what further discovery can there be? Only of forgiveness and repentance, the theme of the last plays; of charity, and the contrite and loving heart. Lear has made it; Hermione and Leontes make it; Leonatus and Imogen make it; Prospero makes it, and seals it once for all.

NOTES



Notes

THE FAMILY TREE

This introductory chapter owes something to Haigh's *The Attic Theatre* and to the first volume of Karl Mantzius' *History of Dramatic Art*, a little to Professor Allardyce Nicoll's *Development of the Theatre* and more, as will be apparent, to his *Masks, Mimes and Miracles*.

¹ See Mantzius, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 3-93. The same matter is well handled in the second chapter of Mr Sheldon Cheney's *The Theatre*.

² See Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, p. 65.

³ See Mantzius, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 232 to the end.

⁴ See Mantzius, *op. cit.*, I, pp. 226 onwards.

⁵ See Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, p. 97.

⁶ See Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, p. 133: he speculates that the pantomimists were never as deeply loved by the people at large as were the mimes.

⁷ See Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, pp. 135-50. It should be pointed out, however, that the instances of *religious* drama I have selected have nothing directly to do with the mimes; rather they offer proof that even the Church found itself unable to dispense, in one form or the other, with the mimic art.

⁸ These two appreciations of the Empress Theodora are to be found respectively in the 40th chapter of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* and in Dr Masfield's *Basilissa*

MYSTERY, MIRACLE, MORALITY, INTERLUDE

In this section my principal authorities are Sir Edmund Chambers's *Medieval Stage* and Professor Karl Young's *Drama of the Medieval Church*. In the matter of dates, when and as dates become precisely ascertainable, I have relied on Professor Harbage's *Annals of English Drama*, which has now replaced Fleay's *Chronicle* as a work of reference.

¹ Chambers', *op. cit.*, II, p. 105; but see also Young, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 307-8, p. 409.

OURSELVES AND THE MIDDLE AGES

¹ John Dryden, *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, 1668.

² Early English Text Society, 1893 and onward.

³ H. Barton Baker, *History of The London Stage*, p. 505.

⁴ Sir Adolphus Ward, *English Dramatic Literature*, I, p. 50.

¹ See Chambers, *M.S.*, I, pp. 116-273.

² By Adam de la Halle: "la première de nos pastorales dramatiques ou, comme on a dit, de nos opéras comiques". Gustave Lanson, *Histoire de la Littérature Française*. See also Chambers, *M.S.*, I, p. 171.

³ See Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, p. 156.

⁴ See Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, p. 150.

⁵ In *M.M. & M.* the curious reader will find many examples of this appendage, as worn on the Greek and Roman comic stage.

⁶ For a note on the Vice, see forward, p. 397.

⁷ Pragmatic sanction issued by Charles XII at Bourges, 1438. (Chambers, *M.S.*, I, p. 293.)

⁸ Winchester and Eton were among these. The practice was forbidden at the Reformation, revived under Mary, and fell into disuetude under Elizabeth. See Chambers, *M.S.*, I, pp. 364-8.

⁹ For the Feasts of Fools and Boys, see Chambers, *M.S.*, I, pp. 274-371. See also Young, *Drama of the Medieval Church*, I, pp. 104, etc.

¹⁰ Chambers, *M.S.*, II, p. 206, note 1. Also Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, pp. 147, 210 and Young, *op. cit.*, I, p. 543.

¹¹ For examples, see Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, pp. 154-5.

¹² Hrosvitha (c. 935-?1002), believed of noble German family, entered the Benedictine convent of Gandersheim. Of her erudition there can be no question. Apart from her profound study of the lives of the saints, she is reasonably credited with a knowledge of Ovid, Plautus, Horace, Terence, Virgil and Boethius—whom she quotes—and also of the logic, mathematics, music and astronomy of her day. Her plays are: *The Conversion of Gallicanus*, in two parts; *Dulcitius*; *Callimachus*; *The Fall and Conversion of Mary, niece of Abraham the Hermit*; *Paphnutius, or the Conversion of Thais the Harlot*; and *Sapientia, or the Martyrdom of the Holy Virgins, Faith, Hope and Charity*. They are available to the English reader in the translations of Professor Tillyard and Miss Christopher St John. *Paphnutius* was reveived at a matinee in London early in this century. The beauty of Miss Miriam Lewis made the Thais credible up to the moment of her conversion, but unfortunately this occurs very early in the play.

THE FIRST OF THE MYSTERIES

In this section I have drawn mainly on Young, *op. cit.*, on Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, and on Chambers, *M.S.*

¹ St Ethelwold was Bishop of Winchester during the reign of Edgar (959-79); in his *Concordia Regularis* there are detailed instructions for the performance of the *Quem Quaeritis*, not as part of the Mass, but of the third Nocturn at Matins on Easter morning. (Chambers, *M.S.*, II, pp. 14-15.)

² That is to say, the St Gall *M.S.* is the earliest known, although the Winchester text is evidence that the trope was in use in England before the end of the tenth century.

In this section I have drawn principally on chapters in Chambers's *M.S.* and Prof. Allardyce Nicoll's *Development of the Theatre*, which are familiar to every student of the subject. I have drawn less on Prof. Young's *The Drama of the Medieval Church* because his concern is with the strictly liturgical drama, while ours is with the less absolute religious drama that sprang from it and that the populace embraced.

¹ Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, p. 194.

² Chambers, *M.S.*, III, pp. 82-83. His plan on p. 83 is reproduced by Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, p. 198; *D.T.* p. 65.

³ Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, p. 199.

⁴ A plan is reproduced in Nicoll, *M.M. & M.*, p. 202.

⁵ The huge Théâtre du Châtelet, opened in Paris in 1862, was for many years renowned as a home of spectacular melodrama and musical shows.

⁶ When the Norwich Players were looking for a golden St Michael with ten-foot wings they wisely took him from the Ranworth rood-screen.

⁷ Even in the dialogue, the realism is of a kind transcending chronological accuracy. The youngest of the Towneley shepherds enters with the words "Christ's Cross me save, and Saint Nicholas!" What matter that he cannot possibly know anything about either, as yet, if this was exactly the sort of thing a fifteenth-century shepherd would say, when cursing the bad weather?

⁸ The story of the contest between the two great painters runs, according to my recollection, as follows. Each exhibited a veiled canvas. One of these, when unveiled, disclosed a bunch of grapes so exquisitely done that the judges at first thought that they were real. The other painter was then called on to unveil his work, but he had already done so; he had, in fact, painted the veil: he accordingly was adjudged the winner.

THE DRAMA COMES TO ENGLAND

In this and the following section I have relied on the publications of the Early English Text Society, notably the *York Plays* edited by L. T. Smith, on the relevant chapters in Chambers's *Medieval Stage* and Nicoll's *M.M. & M.* But research goes on; and Dr Richard Southern's forthcoming *The Medieval Theatre in the Round* may give a jolt to some long-accepted theories. If so, I shall gladly defer to a scholarship far surpassing my own—even though Dr Southern should succeed in refuting my view that our medieval drama was inferior to the Greek.

¹ See Young, *op. cit.*, II, p. 211.

² See also Chambers *M.S.*, I, pp. 56-7.

³ See Young, *op. cit.*, II, p. 425.

⁴ Toulmin-Smith. *York Cycle*, Early English Text Society.

⁵ Early English Text Society. *Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, *Extra Series*, 1902.

⁶ I believe Malone was the first to light on this often-quoted description. Robert Rogers was Archdeacon of Chester, and died in 1595. There are two versions in the Harleian MSS. One describes the pageant as having four wheels, the other six.

⁷ Reproduced by Nicoll, *D.T.*, p. 71. But not all authorities agree that the object depicted is a pageant.

THE GREAT CYCLES

One cannot, of course, assign precise dates to these Cycles, which were the growth of many years. The Chester, doubtfully traced back to c. 1328 and first mentioned in 1462, was played until 1575. The York, originated c. 1340-50 and first mentioned in 1378, was played until 1579-80. The Towneley (Wakefield), believed to have taken shape c. 1390-1410, was still being enriched by additions from a master hand in the years between 1420 and 1450. The Coventry (of which all but two plays are lost) is first heard of in 1392 and was last performed c. 1591; whereas the forty-two surviving plays of the *Ludus Coventriae* are dated between c. 1400 and 1450. (Harbage: *Annals*.) It will be seen that the chronological order in which these Cycles are believed to have seen the light is not the same as that in which they were brought to completion. It is the latter order that I have adopted here.

¹ See Chambers, *M.S.*, II, p. 380.

² Ward makes this comment. *Op. cit.*, I, p. 65.

³ See Chambers, *M.S.*, II, pp. 348-52, for his elucidation of this problem.

⁴ This revival was directed by Mr E. Martin Browne.

THE PLAYS AND THE ACTING

In the extracts from the cycles as published by the E.E.T.S., I have not attempted, save in very few instances, to modernise the language. The general purport of the lines should be perfectly clear to the reader, and to substitute modern words would destroy alliterations and assonances dear to the poet.

Derworth, worthy of honour
Feres, companions
Fetys, elegant
Fon, fool
Lemes, rays
Lemman, dear one
Lend, remain
Lowte, reverence
Lykand, pleasant
Mensksfull, worshipful
Passande, surpassing
Sicker, truly
Unbuxon, disobedient
Wrangwysely, wrongfully

¹ Heavily cut, and under the direction of Mr Nugent Monck, I believe *The Castle of Perseverance* emerged as a moving work. I have even heard one authority maintain that if, as Reinhardt strove to do, we could recapture the art of the medieval *metteur-en-scene*, the thing could be played in full with thrilling effect.

² There have been many attempts to clarify the origin and function of the Vice. My own would be this: As the Mysteries grew in scope there was opportunity—in fact there was need—to personify the powers of evil. They must be presented as beings quite the reverse of divine, but none the less supernatural. This task fell to the Fiend and his subordinate imps, and the latter were soon of additional service in keeping the audience amused. The Morality could not win the public of the Mysteries without comic relief, half-fearful, of the same kind. The imps it could freely employ, but in place of the Fiend it required a character who, while embodying wickedness as before, was more nearly human. Each of the Deadly Sins presented an aspect of sin, but the Vice was the agent of sin as a whole. As a bustling, mischievous interferer with the Virtues who were striving for Man's soul, he played as it were the part of a wicked clown. He was indeed of kindred stock to the Fool, but his line petered out when our maturing drama learned how to make him a real person. Iago and Feste are, each in his way, sublimations of him; when Feste compares himself to "the old Vice" he is acknowledging a remote ancestry.

³ A stanza of it runs:

Do not the flowers sprynge freshe and gaye,
Pleasant and swete in the month of Maye?
And when their time cometh, they fayde awaye.
 Reporte me to you, reporte me to you.

⁴ It was revived by Mr Tyrone Guthrie at the Edinburgh Festival.

⁵ A. W. Pollard, *English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes*.

RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

¹ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, chap. LXVIII.

² North's *Plutarch* appeared in 1579, twenty years after Amyot's translation into French.

ELIZABETH AND HER LONDON

¹ There is an illuminating passage on this subject in the second chapter of Dr Dover Wilson's *The Essential Shakespeare*.

² The favourite instance is the speech of Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida*, I, 3. Here if anywhere Shakespeare is speaking through the mouth of his character; but the same idea prevails throughout the canon, even in the sodality of Arden.

TOWARD THE GLOBE

¹ Reproduced in full by Chambers, *M.S.*, II, p. 276.

² De Cabham: *Penitential* (Chambers, *M.S.*, II, p. 262).

³ See Chambers, *M.S.*, II, p. 234.

⁴ That the minstrel carried a player's script or two in the depths of the professional basket is suggested by the *Interludium de Clerico et Puella*, which is assigned to the reign of Edward I and has been traced to earlier sources. Chambers gives the text in *M.S.* II, p. 321. It may well have incurred de Cabham's censure, for in it the love-lorn Clericus declares that he

were liever to be dead
Than lead the life that I lead.

Can this have been one of the *ludi histrionum* that the abbots and monks were forbidden, in 1285, to enjoy?—See *ante*, p. 32.

⁵ See Chambers, *M.S.*, II, p. 186.

⁶ See Chambers, *M.S.*, II, pp. 211-12.

⁷ See Nicoll, *D.T.*, pp. 81 *et seq.*

⁸ See Nicoll, *D.T.*, p. 82.

⁹ This *Andria* was for reading, not playing. It was first published between 1516-33. (Harbage.)

¹⁰ UDALL, Nicholas (1505-56)? *Thersites*, 1537; *Ralph Roister Doister*, 1553; in addition sundry minor interludes and entertainments.

¹¹ The series began with Thomas Brown's translation of the *Thebais*, lost but conjecturably played at King's College, Cambridge; none of the other versions seem to have been written for playing.

¹² *Henry IV*, I, II. 4.

THE CHRONICLE PLAYS

From this point onward I have been guided, with very rare exceptions, by the dates and ascriptions of authorship supplied by Professor Harbage in his *Annals of English Drama*. In the play-lists that follow, any date that is positively established will be given as, e.g., 1595. But if that is no more than the likeliest date: if the play *might* have appeared a year or two earlier or later: it will be given as c. 1595. Wherever doubt exists as to authorship or part-authorship, a query sign will be inserted.

¹ I have been greatly helped here by the classification made by Addington Symonds in *Shakespeare's Predecessors*.

² See Shakespeare's *Complete Works*, edited by Charles Jasper Sisson, London, 1953: also Professor Sisson's note on the play.

³ Harbage queries the ascription of this play to Greene; *op. cit.*, p. 50.

BROADSHEET DRAMA

¹ In sympathetic hands *Thérèse Raquin* (the play, not the book) reveals itself as a work of as much beauty as horror. Any producer who falls under its spell may safely be trusted with *Arden of Feversham*.

THE TRAGEDY OF BLOOD

¹ KYD, Thomas (1558-94): ? *Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, 1582; *Spanish Tragedy*, c. 1584-c. 1589; ? *An early Hamlet*, c. 1587-c. 1590; ? share in *The Taming of a Shrew* of about same date; ? share in *King Leir*, c. 1588-94; ? *Soliman and Perseda*, c. 1589-92; ? *Arden of Feversham*, 1585-92; ? *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, c. 1588-94; *Pompey the Great* and ? *Portia*, c. 1594.

THE SCHOLAR DRAMATISTS

¹ LYL, John (c. 1553-1606): *Campaspe and Sapho and Phao*, c. 1584; *Galathea*, c. 1585; *Endymion*, 1588; *Midas and Mother Bombie*, c. 1589; *Love's Metamorphosis*, c. 1590; *Woman in the Moon*, c. 1593; ? *Maid's Metamorphoses*, c. 1616; in addition sundry entertainments of a semi-dramatic nature.

² See *Henry IV*, I. II. 4.

³ GREENE, Robert (1558-92): *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* and ? *Tragedy of Job*, c. 1587; ? share in *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, c. 1588; *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and ? share in *The Taming of a Shrew*, c. 1589; ? *George a Greene, the Pinner of Wakefield*; *James IV*; (with Lodge) *A Looking Glass for London and England*; ? share in *Edward III, King Leir* and *Mucedorus*—all c. 1590; *Orlando Furioso* (? with Rowley) and ? share in *Locrine*, c. 1591; ? *Selimus* and ? share (with Chettle) in *John of Bordeaux, or The Second Part of Friar Bacon*, c. 1592.

Among the partly autobiographical works alluded to in this section are *The Mourning Garment*, *Never Too Late*, *A Groatsworth of Wit* and *The Repentance of Robert Greene*. These partly explain the fervid didacticism that he could not keep out of some of his plays.

His *Planetomachia* indicates the range of his learning. He was, says his editor in the Mermaid Series—whose Introduction is well worth study—"during the last twelve years of a short but varied and active life . . . easily the most widely read of English writers. . . . He was in fact the first *litterateur* of England." . . .

⁴ LODGE, Thomas (c. 1557-1625): ? *Play of Plays and Pastimes*, c. 1582; *Wounds of Civil War of Marius and Sulla*, and share in *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, c. 1588; ? with Greene, *A Looking Glass for London and England*; ? share in *King Leir* and *Mucedorus*, c. 1590; ? share in *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, c. 1591.

⁵ PEELE, George (1556-96): *Iphigenia* (from Euripides), c. 1579; *The Arraignment of Paris*, c. 1581; *David and Bathsheba*, c. 1587; *Turkish Mahomet and Hiren the Fair Greek* and ? share in *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, c. 1588; *The Battle of Alcazar* and ? share in *The Taming of A Shrew*, c. 1589; *The Old Wives' Tale* and ? shares in *King Leir*, *Mucedorus* and *Soliman and Perseda*, c. 1590; *Edward I* and ? *Jack Straw*, also ? shares in *Locrine* and *The True Tragedy of Richard III*, c. 1591; ? *A Knack to Know a Knave*, c. 1592; ? *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany* (? with Chapman), c. 1594; in addition, sundry semi-dramatic entertainments.

⁶ NASHE, Thomas (1567-1601): share in *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (with Marlowe), 1587; *Summer's Last Will and Testament*, c. 1592; share in *Isle of Dogs*, 1597; in addition, poems, pamphlets, satires, etc.

IN TRIUMPH THROUGH PERSEPOLIS

¹ MARLOWE, Christopher (1564-93): *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (with Nashe), and *Tamburlaine the Great*, 1, 1587; *Tamburlaine the Great*, 2, c. 1588; *The Jew of Malta* and ? share in *The Taming of a Shrew*, c. 1589; ? share in *Edward III*, c. 1590; *Dr Faustus* and *Edward II*, c. 1592; *The Massacre at Paris*, 1593; *The Maiden's Holiday* (? with Day), 158?-93. Harbage countenances an earlier date than 1592 for *Faustus*, which is certainly a less sustained work than the *Edward II* of that year, and I have adopted that order.

² Swinburne's Marlowe in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* still ranks as high as ever; see also Addington Symond's *Shakespeare's Predecessors*.

³ It has been speculated whether Samuel Rowley had a hand in these inferior scenes. (Harbage.)

⁴ Leslie Hotson: *The Death of Christopher Marlowe*. As to Marlowe's alleged atheism, Dr Hotson's further research has shewn that between taking his B.A. and M.A. at Cambridge he was for some time abroad on secret service for the Crown. There is a strong presumption that, like Anthony Munday, he was employed to spy into the activities of the Catholic seminaries on the Continent. At least he was in favour with the authorities, for his application for Mastership of Arts was backed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Treasurer and the Lord Chamberlain. We may not like him the better for this; but if he himself had any inward irk it might well find vent, when he was in his cups, in nihilistic utterances of the kind attributed to him. But by which are we to judge him—by the taproom talk recorded by the wholly unreliable Bame, or by the opening and close of *Doctor Faustus*?

A MOTLEY TO THE VIEW

¹ SHAKESPEARE, William (1564-1616): *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Henry VI*, 2, 3, c. 1591; *Henry VI* 1, and *The Comedy of Errors* c. 1592; *Richard III* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, c. 1593; *Titus Andronicus* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, c. 1594; *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and share in *Sir Thomas More*, c. 1595; *King John* and *The Merchant of Venice*, c. 1596; *Henry IV*, 1 and 2, c. 1597; *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 1597, *Much Ado about Nothing* (? = *Love's Labour's Won*), c. 1598; *Henry V*, 1599; *Julius Caesar* and *As You Like It*, c. 1599; *Twelfth Night*, 1600; *Hamlet*, c. 1601; *Troilus and Cressida* and *All's Well that Ends Well*, c. 1602; *Measure for Measure* and *Othello*, c. 1604; *King Lear*, c. 1605; *Macbeth*, c. 1606; *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Timon of Athens*, c. 1607; *Pericles* (? part authorship) and *Coriolanus*, c. 1608; *Cymbeline*, c.

1609; *A Winter's Tale*, c. 1610; *The Tempest*, 1611; ? *Two Noble Kinsmen* (? with Fletcher and Beaumont), c. 1613; *Henry VIII* (with Fletcher), 1613.

I have followed Professor Harbage's dating except in the case of the *Merry Wives*. The evidence adduced by Dr Hotson in *Shakespeare Versus Shallow* seems to establish firmly that this play saw the light on St George's Day, 1597. If so, at least the first part of *Henry IV* must have appeared before April of that year.

² Of the principal heretics, or anti-Stratfordians, Mr Ivor Brown cites (in his *Shakespeare*) Mr Roderick Eagle as the best of the Baconians, Mr Percy Allen as the passionate champion of the Oxfordians, whose cult began with Mr J. T. Looney, Mr Gilbert Slater, whose *Seven Shakespeares* argues a multiple authorship, and two other authorities, one of whom (Prof. Lefranc) makes a claim for one of the Earls of Derby. To them must now be added the name of Mr Hoffman, for whom Marlowe is the man.

³ Mr Brown pays serious attention to Frank Harris's *The Man Shakespeare*, which I have perhaps glanced at too slightly here.

⁴ George Whetstone (c. 1544-c. 1587) published the two parts of *Promos and Cassandra* in 1578. It does not seem to have been played; he had other interests in life, and this is his only recorded adventure in the drama. Yet considering when it was written it is a surprisingly mature piece of work.

⁵ See note 3, p. 401, as to the possibility that Samuel Rowley "doctored" *Faustus*.

⁶ Some of Betterton's talk was drawn on by Nicholas Rowe in his preface to his edition of the plays in 1709.

⁷ Hotson, *op. cit.*, convinces us that Shallow is a caricature of William Gardener, a corrupt and truculent Surrey magistrate who made war on the Bankside theatres.

⁸ Whether Dover Wilson's surmise is correct or not, I cannot here withhold my tribute to his *The Essential Shakespeare*: it extends a scholar's hand across the gulf that separates the study from the stage, a hand that Granville-Barker was quick to grasp.

⁹ I recorded this quietist view some years before the appearance of Mr Ivor Brown's *Shakespeare*. On consideration I let it stand because it is tenable, and because it has the merit of being the least sensational. I may have been impelled to hold it by a surfeit of emotional Birthday luncheon oratory. Nevertheless, I do not invite the reader to fall in with it until he has read, in Mr Ivor Brown's pages, the most convincing reconstruction of a *real* Dark Lady that I have yet encountered.

THE MASTER OF THE REVELS

In this section I have drawn largely on Chambers's *Elizabethan Stage*, I, II.

¹ Actually Tilney's patent was not confirmed until July 24, 1579, but he held the office, and enjoyed its emoluments, from the previous Christmas. (Chambers, *E.S.*, II, p. 104.)

² See Chambers, *E.S.*, I, pp. 99-105.

³ See Chambers, *E.S.*, I, p. 78.

A PLACE OF ONE'S OWN

¹ "Strange's men performed here in 1589 and 1594 and perhaps in the interim during the winter seasons."—See Harbage, who also surmises (as he does in respect of the Bell and the Bell Savage) that this inn-yard was "probably altered for theatrical purposes".

² "Not with above 100 marks." Chambers, *E.S.*, II, p. 305. A mark was worth 13s. 4d.

³ "Mantzius, Vol. III, pp. 13 *et seq.*

⁴ "The structure was still standing in 1683, but after 1617 had been used exclusively for bear-baiting." (Harbage.)

⁵ According to *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, the building was suppressed before it was completed: nevertheless, it appears to have been used as stated.

⁶ According to Harbage, this house was possibly "a converted inn, located somewhere in Middlesex, and occupied by Worcester's and Oxford's Men in 1602 and by Queen Anne's Men 1603-1606".

A ROOF OF ONE'S OWN

¹ For the details here given of the two houses at Blackfriars I have relied mainly on Chambers, *E.S.*

² In Harbage's view it reached "the end of its career as a regular theatre" about 1614.

LITTLE EYASES

My main authority here is Chambers, *E.S.*

¹ This figure excludes certain performances given at Court by Italian companies, 1574-6.

² Thomas Heywood, in his *Apology for Actors*, inveighs against those who commit "their bitterness and liberal invectives against all estates to the mouths of children, supposing their juniority to be a privilege for any railing, be it never so violent".

Hartley Coleridge, quoting this with warm approval in the Introduction to a nineteenth-century edition of the works of Massinger and Ford, adds, darkly, "but the part of a choir-boy is too histrionic to be wholesome in itself".

COPPER-LACE GENTLEMAN

Most of what follows here is condensed, or selected, from the material amassed by Chambers in his *Elizabethan Stage*. If, as I fear, the pattern is too intricate for the general reader to follow with any enjoyment, I shall be content, hoping only that he will derive from it some sense of the vitality which characterised those years of stage history when the actor was establishing himself as part of the social scheme.

¹ See p. 93.

² Harbage is my authority for this assertion. But I do not know whether the later Palsgrave's Men were an entirely new organisation availing themselves of the old name, or whether there was some continuity.

³ In *Shakespeare versus Shallow* Dr Hotson seems to establish beyond dispute that the *Wives* appeared on St George's Day (April 23rd), 1597.

⁴ See *Sir Henry Irving*, by Laurence Irving, p. 673.

⁵ See, however, note 2 above.

⁶ J. Payne Collier (1789-1853). Among other iniquities he was given to inserting forgeries (in brown ink) in a Shakespeare Folio, by way of justifying his emendations of the text.

SOME PORTRAITS

¹ Richard Flecknoe, *A Short Discourse of the English Stage*, 1664.

² Quoted in *The Life and Times of Edward Alleyn*, by G. L. Hosking, chap. XXIII.

³ John Davies of Hereford, *The Scourge of Folly*, 1610.

⁴ There is conflict of testimony as to the date of Armin's death: Chambers gives it as c. 1610, the *Oxford Companion* as c. 1611, and in a note on Shanke as 1615.

⁵ See Mr Ivor Brown's *Shakespeare*, p. 243 onwards, on the subject of the boy heroines.

ACTING AND STYLE

¹ Mantzius, *op. cit.*, II., p. 190 onward.

² The passage that follows owes a good deal to Mr B. L. Joseph's *Elizabethan Acting*.

³ Reproduced in *Elizabethan Acting* (Joseph), Figs. 2-6.

SHARING AND MANAGEMENT

Chambers, *E.S.*, is again my chief source here.

¹ The boy actors were usually on an apprenticeship footing, their masters being senior members of the company.

THE STAGE

¹ The story of the Elizabethan Stage Society will be found in Mr Robert Speaight's *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival*. I have spoken of them as Puritans, but some of them were so only in their attitude to the staging of Shakespeare. Stewart Headlam, the lion-hearted clergyman who went bail for Wilde, was a great addict of the Empire ballet, and had words with the Bishop of

London in consequence. The "no cuts" slogan, echoed by Granville-Barker, developed from the "no scenery" slogan. Poel himself could be extraordinarily prudish: in *Measure for Measure* "He hath got a wench with child" became "He will shortly be a father". —(Speaight, *op. cit.*).

² I exclude of course such pioneers as W. J. Lawrence, in whose *The Elizabethan Playhouse* and subsequent studies there is no evidence of a closed mind. It was the camp-followers who developed the *idée fixe*.

³ *Shakespeare's Arena*, by Leslie Hotson, reprinted from *The Sewanee Review*, July, 1953.

⁴ The *Olimpico* was begun in the spring of 1580, but Andrea Palladio died on the 19th of August following. Vincenzo Scamozzi completed it in 1584. (Nicoll, *Development of the Theatre*, p. 88) The scenic vistas were added on the occasion of the visit of the Empress Marie of Austria in 1585. (*Oxford Companion to the Theatre*.)

⁵ For Serlio's influence on the Masque see below, p. 230. Many years ago I explored the stage of the *Olimpico*, much puzzled as to how its cyclorama had been lit. I made my way up the steep central perspective until the buildings that flanked it were hardly taller than I was, and felt behind a parapet. The first thing my hand encountered was a round iron lamp-bracket, black and oily. There may have been a hundred such.

⁶ A setting of the kind, for the *Andria* of Terence, is reproduced in Nicoll, *D.T.*, p. 83.

⁷ See *Shakespeare's "Tempest" as Originally Produced At Court*, by Ernest Law, C.B. Mr Law came valiantly to the defence of a scenic *Tempest* at Stratford in 1919.

⁸ Hotson, *op. cit.*

⁹ When these Notes were in proof Prof. A. C. Sprague called my attention to an ingenious theory: that what De Witt saw may have been a *rehearsal*, and that the persons at the back would not have been there during a performance.

¹⁰ To be precise, the audience sat on three sides of the arena. At one end of the hall there were vast doors, which opened on occasion to reveal a scenic setting. But in the acting the arena technique was freely used.

¹¹ Nicoll, *D.T.*, pp. 125-6.

¹² Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare: Second Series*, p. 253.

¹³ Reproduced in Nicoll, *D.T.*, p. 135.

¹⁴ Of all the plays of Shakespeare, none has suffered more from managerial skittishness than the *Shrew*. It may be that our theatre cannot project itself into a less feminist age, even that it finds Petruchio oppressively male. But as long as we devote our invention to persuading the audience that what they are seeing is only a play within a play, so long will these two great parts continue to elude us, and leave us wondering what on earth John Drew and Ada Rehan, Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton, can have made of them. Asche was Petruchio; he indulged the purists by retaining the Induction, but he played Sly himself, and banished that over-rated sot from the stage when it was over.

THE TWO HOURS' TRAFFIC

¹ Henry Crosse in *Vertues Common-wealth*, 1603.

² *The Gull's Horne-booke*, 1609.

³ Orazio Busino, writing to the Counsel of Venice, December 8, 1617. He comments also on the "sumptuous dresses of the actors" and the incidental music, etc.

THE MASQUE

¹ The *Teatro Farnese* was completed in 1618 or 1619. See Nicoll, *Development of the Theatre*, pp. 89 *et seq.*

² Reproduced by Nicoll in his *D.T.*, p. 127, from a design by Inigo Jones in the possession of the Duke of Devonshire. Harbage however, gives 1632 as the date of Aurelian Townshend's *Albion's Triumph*, and mentions no other masque of that name. The discrepancy of dates does not affect the fact that within a very short time of conceiving the masque setting as a picture the designer was faced with the obligation to provide it was a frame.

³ See Jonson's *An Expostulation with Inigo Jones*, beginning:

Master Surveyor, you that first began
From thirty pounds in pipkins, to the man
You are: from them leap'd forth an architect,
Able to talk Euclid and correct
Both him and Archimede . . .

Every dramatist must see Jonson's point of view: no producer can help reflecting how much Inigo Jones must have enjoyed himself.

⁴ The passages that follow are based on the designs in the possession of the Duke of Devonshire, and the reconstructions of the stage plans in Reyher's *Les Masques Anglais* (reproduced by Nicoll, *D.T.*, pp. 129-31.)

⁵ I believe I am right in asserting that the central figure in this group was the King himself.

⁶ Some time after writing these lines, I was glad to be fortified in this contention by Miss St Clare Byrne's account of stage lighting in *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre*; see in particular p. 463.

⁷ According to Harbage, Jonson did write an *Entertainment of the Two Kings of Great Britain and Denmark*, presented at Theobalds in 1606, but he records as anonymous the authorship of *Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, presented at the same place on the same occasion.

⁸ From this engaging passage, it is clear that Sir John Harrington had a great regard for seamliness. It is further evidence of this that he was the inventor of the water-closet: his design is extant, and the thing has not altered in principle down to our day.

⁹ The play was *The Whip*, produced at Drury Lane in the autumn of 1909, and in the judgment of some authorities that theatre's crowning achievement in spectacular melodrama.

¹ CHETTLE, Henry (c. 1560-1607). Plays lost: as sole author, twelve; as part author, twenty-nine. Plays surviving: share in *Sir Thomas More* (with Munday, Dekker, Shakespeare and ? Heywood), c. 1595; share (with Munday) in *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* and *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*, 1598; share (with Dekker) in *Troilus and Cressida* (plot only extant), 1599; shares (with Day and ? Haughton) in *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green, I*, and (with Dekker and Haughton) in *Patient Grissel*, 1600; *Hoffman, or Revenge for a Father*, 1603.

DABORNE, Robert (?-1628). Plays lost: as sole author, three; as part author, one. Plays surviving: *The Christian Turned Turk* and ? share with Dekker in *If it Be not Good the Devil is in It*, c. 1610; *The Poor Man's Comfort*, 1617.

DANIEL, Samuel (c. 1563-1619): *Cleopatra*, 1593; *Philotas*, completed 1604. Daniel is chiefly remembered for his masques and pastorals, e.g. *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*, 1604; *Tethy's Festival*, 1610, and *Hymen's Triumph*, 1614.

DAY, John (c. 1574-c. 1640). Plays last: as sole author, three; as part author, thirteen. Plays surviving: share (with Chettle and ? Haughton) in *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green, I*, and (with Dekker and Haughton) in *Lust's Dominion*, 1600; ? *The Return from Parnassus, I, II*, c. 1602; *The Isle of Gulls*, 1606; *Law Tricks* (? with Wilkins) and *The Travails of the Three English Brothers* (with Williams and W. Rowley), c. 1607; *Humour out of Breath*, c. 1608; *The Wonder of a Kingdom* (with Dekker), 1623.

DRAYTON, Michael (c. 1563-1631). Plays lost: as sole author, one; as part author, fourteen. Plays surviving: share in *Sir John Oldcastle* (with Munday and others), 1599; ? *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*, c. 1602; ? *The London Prodigal* (also attributed to Dekker or Marston), c. 1604.

FIELD, Nathan (1587-c. 1620). *A Woman is a Weathercock*, c. 1609; *Amends for Ladies*, c. 1611; share with Beaumont and Fletcher in four moral plays, c. 1612; share with Fletcher and Massinger in *The Honest Man's Fortune*, 1613; ? share in *The Faithful Friends* (anonymous), c. 1614; shares with Fletcher and Massinger in *The Jeweller of Amsterdam*,* and *The Queen of Corinth*, c. 1617; share with Fletcher and Massinger in *The Knight of Malta*, c. 1618; share with Massinger in *The Fatal Dowry*, c. 1619.

HAUGHTON, William (c. 1575-1605). Plays lost: as sole author, four; as part author, thirteen. Plays surviving: *Englishmen for my Money*, 1598; ? share in *The Blind Beggar of Bednal Green* (with Chettle and Day), share in *Patient Grissel* (with Chettle and Dekker), share in *Lust's Dominion* (with Day and Dekker) and *The Devil and his Dame*, 1600.

MUNDAY, Anthony (c. 1553-1633). Share in some ten lost plays. ? *The Two Italian Gentlemen*, c. 1584; *John a Kent and John a Cumber* and ? *A Knack to Know an Honest Man*, c. 1594; share in *Sir Thomas More* (with Dekker, Chettle, Shakespeare and ? Heywood), c. 1595; share (with Chettle) in *The Downfall of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* and *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*,

* Lost.

1598; share (with Drayton and others) in *Sir John Oldcastle*, I, 1599. In addition, six civic pageants, 1605, 1614-18.

PORTER, Henry (?-?): *The Two Angry Women of Abington*, I, c. 1598; the second part and two other plays are lost.

ROWLEY, Samuel (?-1624): ? *The Famous Victories of Henry V* and ? shares in *The Troublesome Reign of King John*, c. 1586-8; ? share in *The Taming of a Shrew*, c. 1589; ? share (with Greene) in *Orlando Furioso*, c. 1591; ? share (with Marlowe) in *Dr Faustus*, c. 1592; share in ? comic additions to same, 1602: *When You See Me You Know Me*, c. 1604; *Richard III*,* *Nonesuch** and *The Four Honoured Loves*,* c. 1623; *Match or No Match*,* 1624.

ROWLEY, William (?-1624): ? share (with Day and Williams) in *The Travails of the Three English Brothers*, 1607; *A Shoe-Maker a Gentleman* and (? with Middleton) *The Birth of Merlin*, c. 1608; *A New Wonder, A Woman Never Vexed* and ? revision of Beaumont's and Fletcher's *The Coxcomb*, c. 1609; *Hymen's Holiday* and ? share (with Fletcher) in *The Captain*, c. 1612; *The Knaves*, I, II,* 1613; *A Fair Quarrel* (with Middleton) and ? *The Tell Tale*, c. 1617; *The Old Law* (with Middleton) and ? share in Middleton's *The Mayor of Queensborough*, c. 1618; *The World Tossed at Tennis* (with Middleton), 1620; share (with Dekker and Ford) in *The Witch of Edmonton*, 1621; *The Changeling* (with Middleton), *A Match at Midnight* (? with Middleton) and *All's Lost by Lust*, c. 1622; *The Spanish Gypsy* (with Middleton) and *The Maid in the Mill* (with Fletcher), 1623; share (with Dekker, Ford and Webster) in *The Late Murder in Whitechapel** and ? in Massinger's *The Parliament of Love*, 1624; *A Cure for a Cuckold* (with Webster and ? Heywood), c. 1625; ? revision of Fletcher's *The Noble Gentleman* and ? share (with Fletcher or Massinger) in *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, 1626. Note that the last three plays must have been posthumously performed.

² It is thought possible that Middleton had a hand in *A Match at Midnight*. (Harbage.)

³ JONSON, Ben (1572-1637). Plays: *The Tale of a Tub* (revised 1623), c. 1596; *The Case is Altered* (revised later), c. 1597; *Hot Anger Soon Cold** (with Chettle and Porter) and *Every Man in His Humour*, 1598; *Every Man Out of His Humour*, and shares with Chettle and Dekker in *Robert King of Scots** and with Dekker in *The Page of Plymouth*,* 1599; *Cynthia's Revels*, c. 1600; *The Poetaster*, 1601; *Richard Crookback** (? uncompleted), 1602; *Sejanus His Fall*, 1603; share with Chapman and Marston in *Eastward Ho!* 1605; *Volpone*; 1606; *Epicæne*, 1609; *The Alchemist*, 1610; *Catiline His Conspiracy*, 1611; *Bartholomew Fair*, 1614; *The Devil is an Ass*, 1616; *The Staple of News*, 1625; *The New Inn*, 1629; *The Magnetic Lady*, 1631; *The Tale of a Tub* (revised), 1633; *The Fall of Mortimer* and *The Sad Shepherd* (both unfinished), 1637. In addition, forty masques and other entertainments.

⁴ Some authorities say as part author: Harbage, however, ascribes *The Isle of Dogs* to Nashe alone.

⁵ Otherwise known as *The Althorpe Entertainment of the Queen and Prince*.

⁶ It has been ingeniously suggested that the inscription given to the mason was *Orare Ben Ionson*, and that, being no Latin scholar, he turned the first word into two.

* Lost.

¹ CHAPMAN, George (c. 1560-1634): ? share (? with Peele) in *Alphonsus, Emperor of Germany*, c. 1594; *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, 1596; *A Humorous Day's Mirth*, 1597; *The Fount of New Fashion*, 1598; *The Four Kings, The Pastoral Tragedy and The World Runs Well on Wheels*, 1599; *The Gentleman Usher and May-Day*, c. 1602; *The Old Joiner of Aldgate and Sir Giles Goosecap*, c. 1603; *All Fools* (rev. of *The World Runs Well*), Bussy D'Ambois and *Monsieur d'Olive*, c. 1604; *The Widow's Tears* and share with Jonson and Marston in *Eastward Ho!* 1605; *Charles, Duke of Byron, I, and II*, 1608; *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, c. 1610. *Chabot, Caesar and Pompey* and *The Yorkshire Gentlewoman and her Son*, c. 1613; share with Brome in *Christianetta*, c. 1633.

² His collaborators in *Eastward Ho!* were Jonson and Marston.

³ Dryden: Dedication to *The Spanish Friar*, 1680, pub. 1681.

DEKKER, HEYWOOD, MIDDLETON

¹ *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets who lived about the time of Shakespeare*, by Charles Lamb, 1808.

² DEKKER, Thomas (c. 1572-1632). Of the seventy-odd plays ascribed to Dekker in whole or part, nearly fifty are lost: the names and dates of many of these are known through Henslowe's *Diary*. The following list comprises only those works which are extant. Necessarily it does scant justice to Dekker's real output: for example, during the year 1598 he is credited with the sole authorship of two plays and part authorship of eleven more: not one of the thirteen survives.

? *Guy of Warwick*, c. 1593; share in *Sir Thomas More* (with Shakespeare, Munday, Chettle, ? Heywood), c. 1594; *Old Fortunatus*, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, ? *A Warning for Fair Women*, and ? share in *Look About You*, 1599; share in *Patient Grissel* (with Chettle and Haughton) and ? *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall*, 1600; shares in *Satiromastix* (with Marston) and *Blurt, Master Constable* (with Middleton), 1601; *The Honest Whore, I* (with Middleton), *Sir Thomas Wyatt and Westward Ho!* (both with Webster), 1604; *The Honest Whore, II* (with Middleton) and *Northward Ho!* (with Webster), 1605; *The Whore of Babylon*, 1606; *The Roaring Girl* (with Middleton), and *If It Be not Good, the Devil is in It* (? with Daborne), c. 1610; *Match Me in London*, c. 1611; ? share in *The Bloody Banquet*, c. 1619; share in *The Virgin Martyr* (with Massinger), 1620; *The Witch of Edmonton* (with Ford and W. Rowley), 1621; *The Welsh Ambassador* and (with Day) *The Wonder of a Kingdom*, c. 1623; *The Sun's Darling* (with Ford) 1624; ? share in *Love's Cure* (with Massinger), 1625. Dekker's civic pageants (e.g. his *Troia Nova Triumphans*, 1612) are excluded from this list.

³ HEYWOOD, Thomas (c. 1573-1641). Since he wrote to be acted and not for publication, of the two hundred and twenty plays in which Heywood claimed sole authorship or "a main finger" only forty-odd are known to us, and of these nine are lost. The remainder are: ? Revision of Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*, c. 1589; ?

share in *Sir Thomas More* (with Shakespeare, Munday, Dekker, Chettle), c. 1595; share in *Edward IV*, I, 2 (with Drayton and Chettle?), c. 1599; *The Four Prentices of London*, c. 1600; *The Fair Maid of the Exchange, How a Man may Choose a Good Wife from a Bad*, and *Royal King and Loyal Subject*, c. 1602; *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, 1603; *If You Know Not Me You Know Nobody, or the Troubles of Queen Elizabeth* and *The Wise Woman of Hogsden*, c. 1604; *If You Know Not Me, etc.*, Second Part and ? *Nobody and Somebody*, c. 1605; ? share in *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, c. 1606; *The Rape of Lucrece*, c. 1607; ? share (with Webster) in *Appius and Virginia*, c. 1609; *The Fair Maid of the West, I* and *The Golden Age*, c. 1610; *The Brazen Age* and *The Silver Age*, c. 1611; *The Iron Age*, I, II, c. 1612; ? share (with Shirley) in *The Martyred Soldier*, c. 1623; *The Captives*, 1624; *The English Traveller*, c. 1625; ? *Dick of Devonshire*, 1626; *The Fair Maid of the West, II*, c. 1631; *A Maidenhead Well Lost*, c. 1633; *Love's Mistress*, 1634; *A Challenge for Beauty*, c. 1634; *Love's Masterpiece*, 1640. This list excludes certain published playlets and excerpts from Heywood's works, also numerous civic pageants on which he was engaged between 1631 and 1639.

⁴ *Pendennis*, chap. IV.

⁵ MIDDLETON, Thomas (1580-1627): ? *Blurt, Master Constable*, c. 1601; *The Family of Love*, c. 1602; *The Honest Whore, I* (with Dekker) and *The Phoenix*, c. 1604; *The Honest Whore, II* (with Dekker) and *A Trick to Catch The Old One*, c. 1605; *A Mad World, My Masters, Michaelmas Term*, ? *The Puritan, or the Widow of Watling Street* and *The Viper and her Brood*,* c. 1606; *Your Five Gallants*, c. 1607; ? share in *The Birth of Merlin* (with W. Rowley), c. 1608; *The Roaring Girl* (with Dekker), 1610; *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, c. 1611; *No Wit, no Help Like a Woman's* (revised by Shirley 1638), c. 1613; *The Witch* and *More Dissemblers Besides Women*, c. 1615; *The Widow* (? with Jonson and Fletcher), c. 1616; *A Fair Quarrel* (with W. Rowley), c. 1617; *The Mayor of Queensborough*, c. 1618; *Anything for a Quiet Life* (? with Webster) and *Women Beware Women*, c. 1621; *The Changeling* (with W. Rowley), 1622; *The Puritan Maid*, *The Modest Wife*, and *The Wanton Widow** and *The Spanish Gypsy* (with W. Rowley—but has also been ascribed to Ford), c. 1623; *A Game at Chess*, 1624; *The Conqueror's Custom*,* c. 1626. In addition, certain masques and civic pageants.

⁶ A Thomas Middleton was admitted member of Gray's Inn in 1596. (Foreword to *Thomas Middleton I* in the Mermaid Series.)

⁷ Prof. Harbage queries the ascription of *The Spanish Gypsy* to Middleton and suggests that Ford may have been the author. To me, the tragic scenes in the play bear Middleton's stamp rather than Ford's.

MARSTON

¹ MARSTON, John (c. 1576-1634): ? share in *Robert King of Scots** (with Chettle, Dekker, Jonson), *Antonio and Melida*, *Antonio's Revenge* and *Histriomastix*, c. 1599; *Jack Drum's Entertain-*

* Lost.

ment, 1600; ? share (with Dekker) in *Satiromastic* and *What You Will*, 1601; *The Dutch Courtesan* and *The Malcontent* (with Webster), c. 1604; *The Fawn* and *Sophonisba*, c. 1605; *The Insatiate Countess* (with Barkstead), 1610.

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER

¹ BEAUMONT, Sir Francis (1684-1616): ? *Mador, King of Britain** and (? with Fletcher) *The Woman Hater*, c. 1606; *The Knight of The Burning Pestle* (with Fletcher), c. 1607; *Cupid's Revenge* (with Fletcher), c. 1608; *Philaster, The Coxcomb* and *Wit at Several Weapons* (all with Fletcher), c. 1609; *The Maid's Tragedy* (with Fletcher), c. 1610; *A King and No King* (with Fletcher), 1611; share (with Fletcher and Field) in *Four Plays or Moral Representations in One* and ? share (with Fletcher) in *The Captain*, c. 1612; *The Scornful Lady* (with Fletcher) and ? *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (? with Fletcher and Shakespeare), c. 1613.

FLETCHER, John (1579-1625): ? share (with Beaumont) in *The Woman Hater*, c. 1606; *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (with Beaumont), c. 1607; *The Faithful Shepherdess* and (with Beaumont) *Cupid's Revenge*, c. 1608; *Philaster, The Coxcomb* and *Wit at Several Weapons* (all with Beaumont), c. 1609; *The Maid's Tragedy* (with Beaumont), c. 1610; *A King and No King* (with Beaumont), and *The Woman's Prize*, c. 1611; *The Captain* (? with Beaumont), c. 1612; *The Scornful Lady* (with Beaumont), *Bonduca, Henry VIII* (with Shakespeare), ? *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (? with Shakespeare and Beaumont) and *The Honest Man's Fortune* (with Massinger and Field), c. 1613; *The Night Walker, Valentinian* and *Wit Without Money*, c. 1614; *Monsieur Thomas*, c. 1615; *Love's Pilgrimage* (? with Beaumont), c. 1616; *The Mad Lover, The Jeweller of Amsterdam*,* *The Queen of Corinth* (both with Field and Massinger) and *Thierry and Theodoret* (with Massinger), c. 1617; *The Loyal Subject* and (with Field and Massinger) *The Knight of Malta*, c. 1618; *The Humourous Lieutenant, The Bloody Brother* (? with Massinger, ? Jonson), *Sir John van Olden Barnavelt* and *The Little French Lawyer* (both with Massinger), c. 1619; *Women Pleased* and (with Massinger) *The Double Marriage, The False One* and *The Custom of the Country*, c. 1620; *The Island Princess, The Pilgrim* and *The Wild Goose Chase*, c. 1621; *The Prophetess, The Sea Voyage* and *The Spanish Curate* (all with Massinger), c. 1622; *The Devil of Dowgate** and (with Massinger) *The Wandering Lovers*, 1623; *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* and *A Wife for a Month*, 1624; *The Chances, The Elder Brother* (with Massinger) and *The Nice Valor* (? rev. by Middleton), c. 1625.

² See William Archer: critical note to the selection of Farquhar's plays in the Mermaid Series.

TOURNEUR, WEBSTER AND FORD

¹ TOURNEUR, Cyril (?1575-1626): ? *The Revenger's Tragedy*, c.

* Lost.

1606; *The Atheist's Tragedy*, c. 1609; ? *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, 1611; *The Nobleman*,* 1612.

² Addington Symonds in his Introduction to *John Webster and Cyril Tourneur* in the Mermaid Series quotes from the Revels accounts a payment of £12 authorised to be made to "Cyril Turner" for some service to His Majesty in Brussels, and comments that the amount does not suggest that Tourneur's commission was of any great importance: *The Oxford Companion to the Theatre* vouches for the Cadiz appointment.

³ William Archer, *The Old Drama and the New*, p. 73.

⁴ Archer, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

⁵ WEBSTER, John (?1575-1634 or later): share in *Christmas Comes but Once a Year** (with Chettle, Dekker and Heywood), 1602; shares in *Sir Thomas Wyatt* (with Dekker ? and others) and in Dekker's *Westward Ho!*, also additions to Marston's *The Malcontent*, c. 1604; share in Dekker's *Northward Ho!* 1605; *Appius and Virginia* (? with Heywood), c. 1609; *The White Devil*, c. 1612; ? share in *The Honest Man's Fortune* (with Fletcher and others), 1613; *The Duchess of Malfi*, c. 1614; *The Guise*,* c. 1615; ? share in *Thierry and Theodoret* (with Fletcher and Massinger), c. 1617; *The Devil's Law Case*, c. 1620; ? share in *Anything for a Quiet Life* (with Middleton), c. 1621; share in *The Late Murder in Whitechapel** (with Dekker, Ford and W. Rowley); ? share in Massinger's *Love Cure*, 1625; ? share in *The Fair Maid of the Inn* (with Fletcher or Massinger), 1626.

⁶ See above, p. 182.

⁷ Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, III, p. 507.

⁸ It will do the reader no harm to learn about her from Mr George Ryland's Introductory Essay to the 1945 edition of the play as published by the Sylvan Press, if only because he will then become acquainted with the terrifying illustrations of Mr Michael Ayrton.

⁹ See prefatory note to *The Duchess of Malfi*, Mermaid Series.

¹⁰ Harbage offers 1638 as an alternative.

¹¹ The couplet occurs in *The Times' Poets*: for Heywood's rhyme, see *ante*, p. 225.

¹² FORD, John (1586-1639): ? *A Bad Beginning Makes a Good Ending*,* c. 1612; share in *The Witch of Edmonton* (with Dekker and W. Rowley), 1621; ? share in *The Spanish Gypsy* (with Middleton and W. Rowley), 1623; shares (with Dekker) in *The London Merchant*,* *The Fairy Knight** and *The Sun's Darling* and (with Dekker, W. Rowley and Webster) in *The Late Murder in Whitechapel*,* 1624; ? share (with Fletcher or Massinger) in *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, 1626; *Love's Sacrifice* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, c. 1627; *The Lover's Melancholy* and ? *The Queen, or the Excellency of her Sex*, c. 1628; *The Broken Heart*, c. 1629; *Perkin Warbeck*, c. 1633; *The Fancies Chaste and Noble*, c. 1635; *The Lady's Trial*, *Beauty in a Trance* and *The Royal Combat*, c. 1638.

¹³ According to Harbage this play cannot have been written earlier than c. 1625 or later than 1633, when it was published, having been played by the King's Men at the Blackfriars.

¹⁴ Harbage conjectures that this play was written between c.

* Lost.

1624 and 1634; when it was published after having been played by Queen Henrietta's Men.

¹⁵ The limiting dates according to Harbage are c. 1630-1636.

MASSINGER

¹ MASSINGER, Philip (1583-1640): ? *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, 1611; ? share in Fletcher's *The Captain*, c. 1612; ? shares in Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady* and *The Honest Man's Fortune*, c. 1613; ? share in *The Faithful Friends* (ascribed to Beaumont and Fletcher), c. 1614; with Fletcher and Field in *The Jeweller of Amsterdam** and *The Queen of Corinth*, c. 1617; also in *The Knight of Malta* and ? with Middleton in *The Old Law*, c. 1618; *The Fatal Dowry* (with Field), ? *The Bloody Brother*, *Sir John van Olden Barnavelt* and *The Little French Lawyer* (all with Fletcher), c. 1619; *The Virgin Martyr* (with Dekker), *The Double Marriage*, *The False One*, *The Custom of the Country* (all three with Fletcher), *The Duke of Milan*, *Antonio and Vallia** and *Philenzo and Hippolyta** (? both with Dekker), c. 1620; *The Maid of Honour* and *The Woman's Plot*, c. 1621; shares in *The Propheetess*, *The Sea Voyage* and *The Spanish Curate* (all with Fletcher), 1622; *The Wandering Lovers* (with Fletcher), *The Bondman* and *The Dutch Painter*,* 1623; *The Renegado* and (? with W. Rowley) *The Parliament of Love*, 1624; ? share in *The Elder Brother* (with Fletcher), *Love's Cure* (? with Webster and Dekker) and *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, c. 1625; ? *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, *The Unnatural Combat* and *The Roman Actor*, c. 1626; *The Judge** and *The Great Duke of Florence*, 1627; *The Honour of Women*,* 1628; *Minerva's Sacrifice** and *The Picture*, 1629; *Believe as you List*, *The Emperor of the East*, ? *Feast and Welcome** and *The Unfortunate Piety*,* 1631; *The City Madam*, 1632; *The Guardian*, 1633; *Cleander** and *A Very Woman* (? with Fletcher), 1634; *The Orator*,* 1635; *The Bashful Lover*, 1636; *The King and the Subject*,* 1638; *Alexius, or The Chaste Lover*,* 1639; *The Fair Anchoress of Pausilippo** and ? *The Prisoner*,* c. 1640.

² For these biographical details I have drawn on Gifford and Antony Wood, as quoted by Addington Symonds in his Introduction to the selections from Massinger in the Mermaid Series.

³ The play was *The King and the Subject*, and Charles I read it at Newmarket in 1638. The Ship Money dispute was running high, and it seems that Massinger made insinuations adverse to the royal policy. Nevertheless, Charles permitted the Master of the Revels, Sir Henry Herbert, "to allow of the play" (Register of the Master of the Revels).

⁴ According to Sir Aston Cockayne: *Epitaph on Mr John Fletcher and Mr Philip Massinger*.

SHIRLEY

¹ Playwriting, save for the bookshelf, virtually ceased in 1642. Some of the men in the list that follows (e.g. D'Avenant and Killi-

* Lost.

grew) lived to witness the Restoration and became active again. But such plays as they wrote in a later time are not mentioned here.

BERKELEY, Sir William (1600-77). *The Lost Lady*, 1637.

BROME, Richard (?-1652). Share with B. Jonson (junior) in *A Fault in Friendship*,* 1623; *The City Wit* and *The New Academy*, c. 1628; *The Lovesick Maid** and *The Northern Lass*, 1629; *The Queen's Exchange* 1631; *The Court Beggar*, *The Novella* and *The Weeding of Covent Garden*, 1632; *Christianetta* (with Chapman), 1633; shares with Heywood in *The Late Lancashire Witches*, *The Apprentice's Prize** and *Sir Martin Skink*,* c. 1634; *The Queen and Concubine*, c. 1635; *The Sparagus Garden*, 1635; *The Mad Couple Well Mated*, c. 1636; *The English Moor* and *Wit in a Madness*, c. 1637; *The Cunning Lovers*, *The Antipodes* and *The Damselle*, c. 1638; *The Lovesick Count*, c. 1639; *The Jewish Gentleman*, 1640; *The Jovial Crew*, 1641.

CARLELL, Lodowick (1602-75). *The Deserving Favourite*, c. 1629; *The Spartan Ladies*,* 1634; *Arviragus and Philicia*, I, II, 1636; *The Fool Would be a Favourite* and *Osmund the Great Turk*, c. 1637; *The Passionate Lovers*, I, II, 1638.

CARTWRIGHT, William (1611-43). *The Ordinary*, c. 1635; *The Royal Slave*, 1636; *The Lady Errant*, c. 1637; *The Siege, or Love's Convert*, 1638.

D'AVENANT, William (1606-68). *The Cruel Brother*, 1627; *Albovine*, c. 1628; *The Just Italian* and *The Siege* (otherwise *The Colonel*), 1629; *The Wits and Love and Honour*, 1634; *News from Plymouth* and *The Platonic Lovers*, 1635; *The Fair Favourite* and *The Unfortunate Lovers*, 1638; *The Spanish Lovers*, 1639. Also five masques, culminating in *Salmacida Spolia*, 1640.

DAVENPORT, Robert (?-?1651). *The Woman's Mistaken*,* 1620; *The Fatal Brothers** and *The Politic Queen*,* c. 1623; *The City Nighcap*, Henry I* and Henry II,* c. 1624; *The Fool and her Maidenhead Soon Parted*,* and *A New Trick to Cheat the Devil*, c. 1625; *King John and Matilda* and *The Pirate*,* c. 1626.

DENHAM, Sir John (1615-69). *The Sophy*, 1641.

GLAPTHORNE, Henry (c. 1610-43). *Albertus Wallenstein*, c. 1634; *The Lady Mother*, *The Noble Husband** and *The Noble Trial** (the same play?), 1635; *The Hollander*, 1636; *The Ladies' Privileges*, c. 1637; *Argalus and Parthenia*, c. 1638; *Wit in a Constable*, *The Duchess of Fernandina** and *The Vestal*,* c. 1639; ? *Revenge for Honour*, c. 1640.

KILLIGREW, Thomas (1612-83). *The Prisoners*, c. 1635; *Clara-cilla* and *The Princess*, c. 1636; *The Parson's Wedding*, ? 1640.

LOVELACE, Richard (1618-58). *The Scholar*,* 1634; *The Soldier*,* c. 1641.

MARMION, Shackerly (1603-39). *Holland's Leaguer*, 1631; *The Soddered Citizen*, c. 1638; *The Fine Companion*, c. 1633; *The Antiquary*, c. 1635.

MAY, Thomas (1595-1650). *Julius Caesar** (in Latin), c. 1616; *The Heir*, 1620; *Cleopatra, Queen of Egypt*, 1626; *Antigone, the Theban Princess*, c. 1627; *Julia Agrippina, Empress of Rome*, 1628; *The Old Couple*, 1636.

MAYNE, Jasper (1604-72). *The City Match*, 1637; *The Amorous War*, c. 1638.

* Lost.

RANDOLPH, Thomas (1605-35). ? *The Fairy Knight*, c. 1623; *The Conceited Pedlar* and *Aristippus* (monologues), *The Prodigal Scholar* and *The Drinking Academy* (the same play?), c. 1629; *Amyntas* (pastoral) and *The Muses' Looking Glass*, 1630; *The Jealous Lovers*, 1632.

SHIRLEY, Henry (?-1627). *The Martyred Soldier* (? with Heywood), c. 1623; *The Duke of Guise*,* *The Dumb Bawd*,* *Giraldo, the Constant Lover** and ? *The Spanish Duke of Lerma** (all c. 1623-27).

SUCKLING, Sir John (1609-43). *Aglaure*, 1637; *The Sad One* (unfinished), c. 1638; *Aglaure* (second version), 1638; *The Goblines*, c. 1638; *Brennoralt, or the Discontented Colonel*, 1639.

² SHIRLEY, James (1596-1666): *Love Tricks*, 1625; ? *The Brothers*,* *The Wedding* and *The Maid's Revenge*, c. 1626; *The Witty Fair One*, 1628; *The Grateful (or Faithful) Servant*, 1629; *The Humourous Courtier*, *Love's Cruelty* and *The Traitor*, 1631; *The Ball*, *The Changes* and *Hyde Park*, 1632; *The Bird in a Cage*, *The Gamester* and *The Young Admiral*, 1633; *The Example and The Opportunity*, 1634; *The Coronation* and *The Lady of Pleasure*, 1635; *The Duke's Mistress*, 1636; *The Constant Maid* and *The Royal Master*, c. 1638; *St Patrick for Ireland*, *The Politician* and *The Gentleman of Venice*, c. 1639; *The Doubtful Heir* and *The Imposture*, 1640; *The Brothers* and *The Cardinal*, 1641; *The Court Secret* and *The Sisters*, 1642. In addition, three masques: *The Triumph of Peace*, 1634; *The Triumph of Beauty*, 1646; *Cupid and Death*, 1653.

³ The plays in the above list, from *The Constant Maid* to *The Doubtful Heir* inclusive, were all written for Ogilby's Men, but the last named was performed by the King's Men on Shirley's return to London in 1640.

⁴ Shirley's Folio of Beaumont and Fletcher appeared in 1647: it was republished, with additional plays, in 1679.

THE ADVERSARY

¹ The well-known passage in the first chapter of Macaulay's *History of England* is now more than a hundred years old, but as readable as ever.

² The diatribes quoted here may be studied at greater length in Chambers, *E.S.*, II.

³ It was as a counterblast to *Histrionomastix* that the gentlemen of the Inns of Court commissioned Shirley to "invent and write" his prodigious *Triumph of Peace*. This masque, presented at Whitehall on February 3rd, 1634, began with a torchlight procession through the streets from Holborn. The cost is said to have been £21,000.

RETROSPECT

¹ Symonds was consumptive. *Shakespeare's Predecessors*, a robust and exhilarating work if ever there was one, was written in exile at Davos.

* Lost.

² In Mr St John Ervine's *Bernard Shaw, his Life, Works and Friends* there is a pen-portrait of this utterly honest critic and lovable man.—The three words quoted are from a letter in *The Nation* of March 15th, 1919, which sounded the first trumpet-call of the movement that culminated in the foundation of the Phoenix Society.

³ It may seem odd that I should couple these two names. But Ibsen, at the vital moment when he was breaking with romantic drama, learned something from Scribe's technique of the well-made play; so did Pinero, who had certainly much less to say than Ibsen and might never have created Mrs Tanqueray if *Hedda Gabler* had not dared him to do so. But Pinero runs Ibsen pretty close in his power to tell a story in dramatic form.

PRIMUS INTER PARES

¹ Archer (*op. cit.*), stoutly championing the modern drama, admits that in one tirade in Bulwer-Lytton's *Richelieu* Booth was "thrilling, startling, electrifying, beyond anything dreamt of on our humdrum realistic stage".

² Granville-Barker: *Prefaces to Shakespeare: Third Series*, p. 1.

³ For the best presentation that I know of the argument that Shakespeare, like his forebears of the Arden line, was a Catholic, see *Shakespeare Rediscovered*, by the Comtesse de Chambrun. On the other hand, in his *Nature in Shakespearian Tragedy*, Mr Robert Speaight is content to argue that there is nothing in Shakespeare that Catholics cannot accept.

⁴ Matthew Arnold, sonnet *Shakespeare*; Bernard Shaw, *Dramatic Opinions and Essays*.

⁵ Shaw, *op. cit.*

⁶ What happens to the ship in *The Tempest* is perfectly clear; she has Prospero's island on her lee, and fails to weather it.

⁷ I reproduce here a few lines from a small book written some years ago.

Appendix

THE SUBJECT-MATTER OF BIBLE HISTORY AS PRESENTED IN THE FOUR EXTANT ENGLISH CYCLES¹

OLD TESTAMENT

The Fall of Lucifer	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Creation and the Fall of Man	York, Towneley, ² Chester, Coventry.
Cain and Abel	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Death of Cain	Coventry.
Noah and the Deluge	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
Abraham and Melchisedec	Chester.
Abraham and Isaac	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
Jacob's Blessing	Towneley. ²
Jacob's Wanderings	Towneley.
Moses and the Exodus	York, Towneley, Coventry.
Moses in the Wilderness	Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
Balaam and the Ass	Chester.
The Prophets ³	York, ⁴ Towneley, Coventry.

¹ The Cornish cycle (in Cymric) differs a good deal from the English in its choice of episodes. After Balaam it has five—including David and Bathsheba—that the others have not, and itself omits all but the Temptation from the Prophets to the Raising of Lazarus inclusive, substituting for the latter the Healing of Bartimaeus. Thereafter it follows the general scheme, even more completely than the York, for it is the only cycle which presents the Death of Pilate. But it ends with the Ascension.

² Incomplete.

³ For the origin of this episode see Chambers, *M.S.*, II, p. 52. In performance it served as a bridge between the Old Testament and the New. One by one the Hebrew prophets, from Isaiah to John the Baptist, bore witness how they had foretold the coming of Christ. Even respectable authorities of the pagan era were, as Chambers says, "pressed into the service": Vergil on the strength of a line in the *Bucolics* and a Sybil, one of whose utterances (in acrostics) could be interpreted to the same effect.

⁴ Related by a Narrator, not played.

Joachim and Anna ¹	Coventry.
Mary in the Temple	Coventry.
The Betrothal of Mary	Towneley, ² Coventry.
The Annunciation	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Salutation of Elizabeth	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Suspicion of Joseph	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Purgation of Mary	Coventry.
Octavius Caesar ³	Towneley, Chester.
The Nativity	York, Chester, Coventry.
The Shepherds	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Purification	York, Towneley, ⁴ Chester, Coventry.
The Magi before Herod	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Offerings of the Magi	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Flight into Egypt	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Massacre of the Innocents	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Death of Herod	Chester, Coventry.
The Presentation in the Temple	York, Towneley, ⁴ Coventry.
The Baptism of Jesus	York, Towneley, Coventry.
The Temptation	York, Chester, Coventry.
The Marriage Feast at Cana	York. ⁵

¹ An angel reveals to them that their union is to be blessed; in the subsequent episode they appear at the temple with the infant Mary between them. See the apocryphal Book of James, much used by the Greek Fathers and by the western church in the middle-ages.

² Related by a Narrator, not played.

³ The Emperor learns of the prophesy that a child is to be born who will bring his power to naught, and takes steps to ensure the fealty of all his subjects (Towneley); in the Chester cycle he relates how the Roman idols fell at the Nativity. See Isaiah vii. 64; Luke i: 1-3.

⁴ Incomplete.

⁵ Lost.

The Transfiguration	York.
The Woman taken in Adultery	York, Chester, Coventry.
The Healing of the Blind in Siloam	Chester.
The Raising of Lazarus	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Entry into Jerusalem	York, Chester, Coventry.
The Cleansing of the Temple	Chester.
Jesus and Simon the Leper	York, ¹ Towneley, ² Chester, Coventry.
The Conspiracy of the Jews	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Treachery of Judas	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Last Supper	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
Gethsemane	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
Jesus Before Caiaphas	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
Jesus Before Pilate	York, Chester, Coventry.
Jesus Before Herod	York, Chester, Coventry.
The Dream of Pilate's Wife ³	York, Coventry.
The Death of Judas	York, Towneley, Coventry.
The Condemnation	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Bearing of the Cross	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Crucifixion	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Casting of Lots ⁴	York, Towneley, Chester.
The Lamentation of Mary	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.

¹ Lost.

² Related by a Narrator, not played.

³ See the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus; also Matthew xxvii. 19.

⁴ Greatly elaborated in the Towneley cycle: the Tormentors, bringing the garments with them, report to Pilate, who joins in the dicing himself. An outstanding example of this tendency to build up good parts out of small ones is, of course, the *Second Shepherds' Play* in the same cycle.

The Death of Jesus Longeus ¹	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Descent from the Cross	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Burial	York, Coventry.
The Harrowing of Hell ²	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Setting of the Watch	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Resurrection	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Maries at the Sepulchre	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Appearance to Mary of Magdala	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Journey to Emmaus	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Incredulity of Thomas	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
The Ascension	York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.
Pentecost	York, Towneley, ³ Chester, Coventry.
The Death of Mary	York, Coventry.
The Burial of Mary	York, ³ Coventry.
The Appearance of Mary to Thomas	York.

¹ A medieval legend: Longeus, a blind knight, is ordered to pierce the side of the dead Christ with his spear; he does so, and his sight is miraculously restored, whereupon he worships and craves forgiveness.

² Otherwise *Abstractio Animarum ab Inferno*, deriving from the Gospel of Nicodemus (Chambers, *M.S.* II, 74); see also the Creed: *He descended into Hell*. In the medieval view the purpose of His descent was to set free all well-deserving souls, from Adam and Eve to Isaiah and John the Baptist, who had died before His revelation. The routing of the powers of darkness is presented with great spirit, and again there are opportunities for acting: among the damned at Chester there is an alewife who "mars good malt" and gives short measure.

³ Lost.

The Assumption and
Coronation of Mary
The Signs of
Judgment
Antichrist
The Day of Judgment

York, Chester, Coventry.

Chester.

Chester.

York, Towneley, Chester, Coventry.¹

¹ Incomplete.

Authorities

A complete bibliography of the subject in all its aspects would be disproportionate in a book of this kind; moreover, having the general reader in view, I have tried to refer him to as few main sources as possible. The factual information in these pages, then, is derived principally from:

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	<i>The Elizabethan Stage.</i>
HARBAGE, Alfred	<i>Annals of English Drama.</i>
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YOUNG, Karl	<i>The Drama of the Medieval Church.</i>

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SPEAIGHT, Robert

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The King's Peace.

The Essential Shakespeare.

Historia Histrionica.

Life in Shakespeare's England.

Reference may also be made to the scholars and critics grouped as such in the Index. Those who are interested in the growth of our scenic theatre can pursue the subject further in Nicoll, *Stuart Masques and the Restoration Stage* and Reyher, *Les Masques Anglais*; or they can go right back to Sabbatini, *Pratica di Fabricar Scene e Machine ne' Teatro*, Serlio, *Architettura* (trans. as *The Second Book of Architecture*), and Vitruvius, *De Architectura* (trans. as *The Ten Books on Architecture*). I anticipate that fresh light will be thrown on the staging of mysteries and moralities in Dr Richard Southern's forthcoming *The Medieval Theatre in the Round*. The student of Elizabethan stage conditions should not

neglect W. J. Lawrence's *The Elizabethan Theatre* and other studies on the subject. Shakespearean producers (whether seeking to recapture those conditions or no) will do well to steep themselves in Granville-Barker's *Prefaces*.

The admirable *Oxford Companion to the Theatre* did not appear until this book was well-nigh complete; nevertheless I have found it useful and can warmly recommend it as a work of general reference.

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Dodsley's *Old Plays* (Hazlitt's edition); the Tudor Facsimile Texts; the Malone Society's reprints. Collected works; BALE, J. S. Farmer, 1907; HEYWOOD (J.), J. S. Farmer, 1905. The Everyman series, 381, has a selection of moral interludes, including *Everyman*.

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